# ON THE BRANCH

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From the French of
PIERRE DE COULEVAIN

BY

*Alys Hallard*

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From the soul of the daughter
To the soul of the Mother

# CONTENTS


| | | PAGE |
|---|---|---|
| I. | PARIS | 1 |
| II. | CANNES | 16 |
| III. | PARIS | 40 |
| IV. | ENGLAND | 51 |
| V. | PARIS | 110 |
| VI. | BAGNOLES-DE-L'ORNE | 112 |
| VII. | PARIS | 176 |
| VIII. | AIX-LES-BAINS | 299 |
| IX. | PORTE-JOIE | 319 |
| X. | TOURAINE | 324 |
| XI. | PARIS | 387 |

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## I

### PARIS

*Paris.*

Surely I have now almost come to the end of my journey, a journey which has already lasted fifty-seven years. Fifty-seven years my brain has been working, my heart beating and my feet walking. Very good machinery mine must certainly be, for I cannot see any sign yet of its being the worse for wear.

I was doomed to travel quite alone the last stage of my journey. A terrible storm burst, one day, without any warning, over me, a storm which robbed me of my husband, family and home. Ever since then I have lived in hotels, "on the branch." Nothing could be more practical and more agreeable for a woman in my present position. To feel lost in a home too large for me, to sit alone at a table at which I had always seen faces that I loved, to hear the furniture creak during the long winter evenings, to see my visitors gradually dropping off and only to be in touch with the outside world by means of newspapers — all this would be a veritable death in life to me. Providence has spared me such an ordeal, and I am eternally grateful.

Free from all domestic cares and from all material

pre-occupation, my mind has taken a new bent. It is as though it has been recharged, and this time with a more subtle and powerful electricity. At an age when one generally feels one's self getting feebler, it seems to me that I am making progress, and I have been able to get into "the last boat." This phenomenon is certainly not peculiar to me alone. Corot used to say that "in order to get the true beauty and the soul of a landscape one must know just where to sit down," and I think I have succeeded in learning where to sit down and how to look at life. After much groping about I have at last found a place from which it appears to me beautiful and good, yes, good. . . . I no longer see man blind, and yet with full liberty but as a co-operator in the Divine work and immortal as that is. I see him walking in boundless eternity, led on towards distant and glorious horizons. This new vision is a source of precious education to me, a source of consolation and of infinite hope. Why should I not give these to all who need them? Why should I not think for those who have no time to think? Why should I not look at things for those who have no time to look? "On the branch" one sees things from a much higher plane and one sees much farther, too — oh, very much farther.

*Paris.*

A bed-room and a dressing-room on the fourth floor of a first-class hotel in the foreigners' quarter — such is my home. The contents of three trunks constitute my worldly possessions. The scenery for my fifth act is neither grand nor luxurious, but, such as it is, it gives me infinite pleasure.

My window looks on to a fine street, and I see countless human beings pass by, who are most interesting

on account of the variety of their station in life and of their general appearance. From my balcony I have a view of a narrow but extensive strip of the Panorama of Paris, from Sainte-Clotilde to the Cathedral of the Sacré-Cœur, from the Tuileries Gardens to the Boulevard des Italiens, and the colours of the setting sun light up the sky most divinely.

Within the few square yards up and down which I pace, there are a wonderful number of things — a bed, a sofa, two tables, two arm-chairs and a trunk. On one panel of the wall, between the folds of some antique brocade, are the protraits of my remaining friends. On another are those of my acquaintances, people of whom I have a pleasant recollection. Then there are the photographs of dogs that I have loved — Blanchette, Charmant, Bob and Jack. I keep them for the sake of the beam of canine affection that the light has caught in the depth of their eyes. To the right of the chimney-piece is the bracket with my favourite books — the Bible, Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, Molière, Diderot, Don Quixote and Manon Lescaut. Above these is Lefèvre's "Truth" and underneath Ary Scheffer's "Monica and St. Augustine." Facing the door the "Victory of Samothrace," and, fastened on the wall by the side of my bed, a strange, beautiful engraving by Willette. It represents a dark sky illumined with lightning, and, standing out against this background, a huge cross upon which is nailed a human being with hard features roughly drawn. It is the wicked thief, and he is there in his death agony, his hair blown about by the stormy wind, but he is not alone. A woman of the people has her arms round his neck, her lips to his. In order to reach up to his mouth she has had to mount on the beast she has been riding, a small white

donkey driven by a child who, quite abashed, is leaning against the ignominious cross. It may be a Montmartre, St. Ouen or St. Lazare love-story, that I cannot tell, but in that kiss, that straining of the woman's body in order to reach up to the crucified man, there is a force of maternal tenderness, which makes one believe in forgiveness. All these things people my solitude, crowd to my heart and brain, calling forth all kinds of thoughts and feelings. When, added to all this, I have a fire and some flowers in my room, everything seems very gay and delightfully snug. To a woman of my temperament, a woman who likes large rooms with high ceilings, silk draperies, artistic objects that are alike pleasant to the eye and to the touch, and beautiful pictures, it seems as though this most ordinary dwelling place would be a perfect torture. Strangely enough it is not so, for I have become attached to the things with which I am surrounded, because of their very ugliness. The shepherdess on my clock, with her round hat, a dove on her shoulder, a sheep at her feet and a crook in her hand, the clock itself, which would formerly have made me grind my teeth, are now quite dear to me. What I love, though, above all is this great trunk, marked with red and blue, painted with my initials and ornamented with labels which remind me that I am a nomad. I pack and unpack it with equal pleasure. It holds all that is necessary for me, with my life simplified as it now is. In one of its compartments there is the last dress I shall ever wear, my "coffin dress," and the slippers that are to be put on my feet, for there is no one left now to see to all this for me. Ah, my dear trunk! When I die I shall regret it more than I should a palace, and the idea that some day a stranger's hands will rummage in it and disperse its contents is very disagreeable to me.

Yesterday, as I was looking round my room, I could not help smiling. On the chimney-piece is a small statue of St. Anthony of Padoua, the gift of a very religious friend. On the wall I have a horse-shoe, the mistletoe from last Christmas and the Easter branch of palm. Then there are my *gris-a-gris*, fetiches, and symbols, such as one might have found in the ancestral hut. All this is very curious, for I know that these things will not bring me luck, and that they will not preserve me from any evil, yet all the same they are there.

The hotel in which I live, like all the houses in this neighbourhood, dates from the First Empire. In order to introduce the springs necessary for our modern life in a building of another epoch, prodigies of ingenuity were required. I was present at this evolution of the human habitation, and it interested me immensely. It is like the evolution of the mind carried into the material order. The processes resemble each other in the most striking way. In the material order the workman comes across a wall that is too thick, a partition too slight, a beam that is too old. In the intellectual order of things science is impeded by some ancient prejudice, some time-honoured belief, some weak, hesitating mind. It is necessary to bore through, to prop up, to pull down and to reconstruct with infinite precaution, in order to introduce fresh springs into the building and into the brain. The wood and stone will creak and craunch, the intellect will protest, but the inevitable work must be carried through. Baths, lifts, electricity, water-pipes, wires find their place within the old walls. Just in the same way a new ideal takes possession of the mind and the world moves on. I was present at the hotel when the gas-meter was turned off, in order to admit the brilliant new modern light, and on seeing this slay that, I could

not help feeling a pang at my heart. Ah, well — I am among all that is included in the "that" now.

*Paris.*

The knowledge of three languages has made a cosmopolitan of me. It is both a happiness and a misfortune to be a cosmopolitan. It develops the mental faculties, but the soul retains the characteristics of its race, the heart is true to its own country, to its own parish, even. One inspires one's compatriots with distrust and also with envy. One is apt to shock their stationary ideas, their prejudices. One can no longer understand them, and when with them one always feels a painful sensation of isolation.

That it should be possible to get the germ of cosmopolitanism in a small provincial town seems inconceivable, but this was what happened nevertheless. Providence sometimes brings from afar the elements of which it has need for human destinies. An English woman made her appearance in Bourg society. There had never been one in the little town before her. She was the wife of a young doctor and, as she had married against the wishes of her family, all her people ceased to have anything to do with her. English literature of the commencement of the last century had such influence over us as we have never felt since. My mother had the most passionate admiration for Byron, Shelley and Walter Scott, and a countrywoman of theirs could not fail to inspire her with sympathy. She became very intimate with Madame André, who lived in the next house to ours. This friendship had a certain influence over my physical education. When I came into the world I was received, clothed and treated as English children are. My limbs were left free, my head was not covered up, and I was inured to fresh air and cold water. Later

on I wore very short, low-necked frocks, had bare legs and wore my hair down my back. My mother was severely blamed for these innovations, and my playfellows made fun of me and called me "English." Madame André talked to me in her own language as she did to her little boy, and I learned it unconsciously. Homesickness and grief at being separated from her relatives developed the germs of consumption in my mother's friend. She was taken ill and died within a week and her husband then left the place, taking with him his son who had hitherto been my playfellow. After that it seemed only likely that the foreign element would be absent from my life. Such was not the case, for five years later, when I was nearly twelve, an Englishman arrived at Bourg. No one ever knew how or why. He lodged with a widow who had a small house at the entrance to the town and took boarders, professors and others. Madame Permet was a very kind-hearted woman and she took an interest in this foreigner. At his request she tried to find him some pupils, and succeeded in getting five, including myself. Poor Mr. Gray, I feel sure that no one else in the world remembers him. His portrait no longer exists, probably, except in one of the cells of my brain. I wonder how it was that it ever made such a deep impression there. Perhaps it was due to the occult power of the man's own hidden sorrow. I can see him now with his frail outline, his long bent body, his pearly complexion and his sad eyes. It is a curious thing, and would be almost incredible to anyone who does not know what marvels we are, but I can still feel the impression of physical cold which the sight of that body, from which life was ebbing, used to give me. I can see his slender, transparent hands, with well-kept nails, holding my books. They fascinated and awed me; it was as though I uncon-

sciously felt the prestige of superior race to which they testified. With Mr. Gray I was extraordinarily attentive and docile. He taught me his language from *Robertson's Grammar*. Either the method was good or I had a gift for languages, as before long I understood this one. In English there was quite a literature for children at a time when in French we were reduced to the *Veillées du Château*, *Exilés en Sibérie*, Berquin's *Contes*. Our pink and blue series of books for children were still in the limbo of a few feminine minds. In those English books there were no sermons, no models of goodness, impossible to imitate, but real little boys and girls, all the animals of Noah's ark, real life, in fact. This suited me. I was delighted with the stories and, urged on by curiosity, I searched untiringly for word after word in the dictionary. I learned those nursery rhymes that can be accompanied on the piano by one finger, the tunes of which are so easy to catch. All this rooted English very deeply in my mind. Whilst I was advancing in my *Robertson's Grammar*, Mr. Gray was advancing in the book of his life. His pallor increased, the slowness of his movements was more pronounced, his nose began to look pinched, and he had every appearance of being in consumption. During each of my lessons mother made him drink a glass of old Burgundy. While under the influence of the tonic a slight colour came into his pale face, and that colour gave me intense satisfaction. His vital force suddenly failed and he was obliged to stay in bed. He lingered on for a few weeks, and three days before his death his brother arrived. The brother looked older, and gave one the idea that he was of noble birth. What misfortune or what error could have caused Mr. Gray's ruin and his lamentable stranding at Bourg? No one ever discovered the key to the mystery. The Englishman, as

everyone called him, was accompanied to the cemetery by his pupils, their parents and his landlady. His brother read some prayers over the open grave. Chance, if indeed it was chance, placed Mr. Gray next to Madame André, his countrywoman. According to orders left with the Mayor of the town, my tutor's tomb was enclosed by a railing. On the stone which covered it the initials A. G. were carved, and the following words, which I found later on in the Bible: "All His waves and billows have gone over me." As long as we lived at Bourg the exilè had flowers and wreaths on his grave. The thought of that poor chilly body under the cold earth haunted me for a long time, and made me sob at night in my bed.

The year following, at the Sacré-Cœur convent, I took up my English studies again with an Irish nun. Among the Superiors there was a remarkably pretty Piedmontese woman, and for the pleasure of having lessons from her I asked to be allowed to learn Italian. Later on, after spending my holidays with an uncle in Alsace, I wanted to learn German, and a professor was found for me. And all this, English, Italian and German, served to give various shades of thought to my mind so that I might live the life which was destined for me.

*Paris.*

It is now fifteen years since I was uprooted. The death of my husband, M. de Myères, and the ruin which followed, drove me abruptly from the Château of Chavigny, in the department of Cher, and from my beautiful Paris flat in the Place François I. When the disastrous whirlwind was over, I found myself "on the branch" in a hotel. My private fortune had been saved, so that I could try to forget everything by

travelling — and I tried hard. For several years I wandered along all the routes frequented by idlers until, finally, I was weary of seeing museums, churches, monuments and ruins. My banker pointed out to me the necessity of curtailing my peregrinations. I spent more time in Paris, leading there the independent life of a foreigner. My idleness suddenly began to weigh on me and I began to feel the need of creating for myself some interest in life — but what was it to be? I should have liked to do some good in the world, to devote myself to a charitable cause, but no inspiration came to me. No one seemed to have any need of me. Then, too, the winter time of my life began to manifest itself in a hundred disagreeable ways. The warmth and light of my days were gradually diminishing. A flatterer once wanted to persuade Madame Récamier that she was as beautiful as ever, but she answered, with a smile: "No, no, I cannot deceive myself on that score, the little chimney-sweeps never look at me now." Unfortunately there never had been a time when they had looked at me, but I used to possess a little of that mysterious fluid which attracts a glance, or a certain sympathy, and which is our secret pride. I was conscious of the precise moment when this left me. It was one evening at the theatre. I suddenly felt a sensation of strange solitude, the house seemed empty and immense, and I shivered as though a gust of cold wind were blowing over me. It was simply that my magnetic power had been withdrawn. All women have experienced, or will experience at some time of their life, the suffering caused by this operation of Nature. The moral crisis which ensued produced in me the most unexpected of phenomena. I certainly possessed the gift of cerebral creation. My imagination as a child was always manu-

facturing fairy tales and stories. I frequently could not distinguish them from realities, so that they were called untruths. Later on some interior — or exterior — force incited me to write. I heard it through all my sorrows, my joys and my amusements. I could not go to sleep, and I cannot now, without commencing either a romance or a play. As soon as my head is on the pillow the characters take shape, situations are sketched out in my mind and I even hear the persons talking. Then, as though the object of this phantasmagoria were to plunge me into a real dream, sleep overcomes me and prevents my arriving at the *dénouement*. When I was young I was a great reader. I was envious of George Sand's glory, but I believe that her masculine attire and her free life tempted me still more. My mother, alarmed at these tendencies, always made fun of blue-stockings, holding them up to me as very ridiculous personages. Thanks to my indolence and frivolity, she had no difficulty in deterring me from my vocation. Before very long, too, I was caught in a veritable gear wheel, which would certainly have destroyed my creative faculty, if that could have been destroyed. For years I had felt this within me, like something living and precious, like a treasure which I did not use, but that I was glad to possess. And now, in the great silence of age, inspiration has come to me again, strong and irresistible, and I have yielded to it. I remember the day, the very minute when I became its instrument, its creature. In spite of all my efforts I could not escape from it. Without suspecting it, my thought power, as a result of being better nurtured, had acquired force. It had freed from its prison a something which was in some cell at the back of my forehead, and this freedom changed my twilight into a splendid aurora-borealis. When an American woman

discovers in herself some talent, or some special taste, she exclaims joyfully: "I know now why I was born!" Well, then I know now why I have lived.

Oh, that first novel! The title came into my mind, the climax and the last word. In this triangle, my thoughts worked for two whole years. And to my great surprise, to my amazement, I found that my brain had been slowly, very slowly prepared for the work it had to do. American women had been assigned to me as models, I had been thrown constantly with them and had been admitted into their intimacy. Quite unconsciously I had been collecting the notes and the materials necessary for their portraits. The more profound knowledge of life that I had acquired at such cost, my own troubles, my uprooting, my apparently aimless travelling, the millions of impressions that I had been storing up — all this was indispensable. The more I advanced, the more struck was I with admiration at the work which had been accomplished within me and at that which I was executing.

My inexperience was both pathetic and comic. Often when inspiration did not come I went out for a walk. At other times when it arrived like a warm, living wave, I was so joyful that I went out again, taking it with me to the Rue de la Paix, or to the terrace of the Tuileries, and it bore me company.

That first novel! I dragged it about with me in my trunk and it was written in I cannot tell how many hotels. One night at Rheinfelden-les-Bains there was a terrible storm. A thunderbolt set fire to a summer-house in the garden. No one went to bed, but prepared for flight; we all waited in the hall to see what would happen. Some women had their children, others a dog; all of them had little bags containing their jewellery and money. As for me, I simply had my manuscript

fastened round me with a strap. That was my sole treasure. An Alsatian gentleman ventured to ask me, in a joke, what my strange-looking parcel contained.

"A novel that I am writing," I answered.

The mockery of his smile hurt my feelings, but I did not betray myself. When the volume was published I sent him a copy, with a dedication recalling the incident. He read it, and then wrote to me, "You were quite right in wanting to save it."

With the exception of some easy crochet work for the poor, I have never been able to finish anything I have begun. I thought it would be the same with my novel, but from the very first moment I felt myself bound to my writing-table. If I left it for rather too long a time I was drawn back to it irresistibly. Providence had, besides, prepared the aid necessary for the accomplishment of my task — and this aid was a French friend who lived near me in the Place Vendôme. I had made her acquaintance ten years previously. For many long months she had been a prisoner on account of an illness which finally proved fatal. She kept up with the times by her reading. The nobility of her character inspired me with an admiration which I have rarely felt for anyone. She was the only person with whom I should not have feared to be ill and to die. To her alone I talked of my work. She took such an ardent interest in it that I felt encouraged, and often went up to read a few chapters to her. She used to lie on a sofa, and I would sit down comfortably in a large arm-chair facing her, with a cup of tea on a small table to my right. She listened to me with intense interest, and nothing distracted her attention. It was a fresh pleasure to see the emotions I had created reflected in her magnificent black eyes. Her presence and her words acted on my brain in an inspiring and beneficial

manner. I used to go back to my hotel with my mind literally warmed by her sympathy. Without her I am convinced that my novel would have gone to join the unfinished drawings, tapestries and embroideries with which my path through life had been strewn. I finished it victoriously and signed it "Jean Noël"!

Why Jean Noël? Simply because the name sounded joyous and of good omen. The child was born, but what was to be done with it? My friend procured an introduction for me to the manager of one of our important daily papers. I decided, after some hesitation, to take it to him. A woman of fifty-two, absolutely unknown, presenting herself with a manuscript! It seemed somewhat audacious and ridiculous. I was fully aware of this and was as nervous as a young actress making her début. The offices of the paper in question made a disagreeable impression on me. There was something hard in the atmosphere, a something *bourgeois* which immediately ruffled all my feathers. M. P——, for whom I had the introduction, received me very kindly, but with the brusque politeness peculiar to that firm. He took the manuscript from my hands, tossed it on to his desk, saying "C'est bien, madame, nous lirons ça." (Very good, madame, we will read that.)

*That!* — the word took my breath away. He just called it *that* — this thing which had caused nature years of work, which was life itself! Ah, he little knew! No, publishers and editors do not yet know, in the twentieth century, what a manuscript is. If they had any inkling of what it is they would handle it like the Holy Sacrament.

Anyhow my novel was read. It was read, accepted, published as a serial, and then in volume form. Its success gave me the presentiment that Jean Noël would very likely prolong the existence here of Madame de

Myères. I do not see the necessity, but Providence probably does.

I wrote a second novel. The favourable criticism of the first one by an Academician, who was a disinterested lover of literature, and who delighted in bringing to notice any works of merit, opened for me the pages of one of our best reviews. My friend died before the appearance of this new volume which she had particularly liked. The very day of its publication a curious thing happened. I went to call on her mother, and I waited for her in the room where we had so often talked together. It was in April, towards the close of a fine day, and all around me was the silence of twilight. I was just thinking of my friend's sweet, Madonna-like face, with its black eyes, and of her graceful figure, and was regretting that she was no longer there. Suddenly, in the still air, without a single leaf of the trees in the courtyard stirring, a gust of wind — extraordinarily gentle — entered by the open window, enveloped me, and then seemed to go out again. I started, and my heart began to beat fast. I had an instantaneous idea that this manifestation came from her. This impression has never left me. . . . Who knows? Ah, who knows!

I have just finished my third novel and have commenced copying it. For the last five years I have been studying the effect of the work of Life on others, and the curiosity has come to me to study its effect on myself. It is perhaps very imprudent. God knows what cells of the brain my thoughts may open again. Will they be able to avoid that zone which contains so many sacred and sorrowful things? I must be careful as there are some ghosts which should never be evoked.

## II

### CANNES

*Cannes, Hôtel Riche.*

If ever any creature had a belief in liberty it is certainly I. This belief has always made me curiously sensitive to the suggestion of movement. It often happens that I sit down to dinner without having the slightest idea of going out afterwards. If there should be any one in the dining-room ready equipped for the theatre I immediately feel inclined to go too, and I accordingly do so. When I see a friend packing her trunks I have all the difficulty in the world to restrain myself from imitating her. No one could realise all the fluttering about of a woman "on the branch."

As a result of hearing all around me the words "I am going to Nice, to Cannes, to Monte Carlo," a longing to see the south of France again came to me. The ideas which influence our life come to us from outside, and I had received my orders to advance. It was like a little holiday accorded to me after the completion of my novel. Cannes was the only place in the Riviera that I did not know. A sort of fate had always barred the road to it for me hitherto. It attracted me now for that very reason.

To arrive at night in an unknown town, to open my window the following morning on a new horizon and to go out alone in strange streets is an exquisite pleasure to me. The presence of anyone, no matter whom, would entirely spoil this pleasure for me. It is,

as it were, a communion with the soul of the country, that soul created by the race of its inhabitants, the architecture of its houses, the climate, a crowd of things visible and invisible. I always feel it very distinctly. It makes a deep impression on me, and causes me either sadness or joy. The first impression is never effaced, and the remembrance of it alone suffices to reproduce it. After the pleasure of exploring the place to which I have been brought, there is that of making acquaintance with my hotel. The general effect is about the same everywhere. Corridors with doors on each side, like those of a convent or a prison, a dining-room with square or round tables covered with white cloths with their stiff creases, a reading-room with newspapers, hideous books of advertisements, heavy, uncomfortable armchairs, drawing-rooms that are often very magnificent, but which do not look any more private than the street. In spite of all that is hopelessly commonplace, every hotel has a special atmosphere. This atmosphere is antipathetic or congenial, gloomy or gay, according to the disposition of the proprietors, according to the people who frequent it, the general tone of the servants, the arrangements of the rooms. The atmosphere of the immense caravanseras run by companies is icy-cold. It would be impossible for me to endure it for a long time.

The Hôtel Riche, where I am staying, is about ten minutes from the town, in the midst of a park. I like its general aspect. I have a nice room on the fourth floor, and the view from my balcony is very fine. With flowers, my books, a few photographs, my pens, ink-stand and my papers, I can make any place where I am staying seem like home. The arrival in any hotel where I am going to stay for some time always amuses me. The strangers with whom I am about to enter into contact resuscitate my life, vary it, turn it, per-

haps, in another direction, and I, myself, have some kind of influence on them. This excites my curiosity intensely. As soon as one is in a fresh centre one feels the play of those fluids to which are due the continuance of the human being. Your presence affects this person disagreeably, that one agreeably and leaves the others indifferent. Affinities of education, of sentiment, of mind make you find your level quickly. The Hôtel Riche is rather behind the times. It still has a *table d'hôte* as well as private tables. This is less *chic*, but it develops sociability. My first dinner has left me with a good impression. Flowers, men and women in evening dress, gave an elegant look to the room. The conversation seemed to me gay and animated. I saw a few faces that I liked and that were even interesting. The English and American element predominates. I am glad of that, as it means more cleanliness and more propriety. There are enough French, Russians and Spaniards to give a warm colouring to this human group. Well, I do not think I shall be bored here, at any rate.

*Cannes.*

Travelling and the change of surroundings always cause a kind of bewilderment to the mind, a brusque cessation of its work. According to the place in which it finds itself transplanted, it requires more or less time for taking up again the thread of its thoughts. It feels the ground, moves round on the same spot and finally recovers its activity. I am now installed and acclimatized. The new track on which my life has been placed is rather agreeable than otherwise. At seven o'clock my tea is brought to me. I have it in front of my open window, and, while drinking it slowly, I write, with my book on my lap. The pure morning

air is wonderfully refreshing. At times I gaze out at the mountains and the sea . . . my pen stops and a curious intoxication takes possession of me. It is as though I enter into all this beauty of light, as though I am absorbed by something very great. I am no longer here — but over yonder — up there — far away from my body, and I am divinely happy. This sensation is comparatively new to me. It is of brief duration, unfortunately, and I am only too quickly brought back to my scribbling, to my breakfast, to all that I have to do. As soon as I am dressed I go out into the town. The place itself, with its agglomeration of houses, of people, and its shop windows, exercise a certain fascination which no one escapes. The old town of Cannes charms and attracts me always. I stop at the flower-market, I go into the book-shop, I stroll along on the Croisette. After lunch and the little chat during coffee, I go back to my room. I lie down on the sofa, read the papers and sleep for a few minutes. After this daily *siesta* I always get up feeling fresh and rested. In the afternoon, either alone or with someone, I go for a long walk or drive which invariably ends with a cup of tea at Rumpelmayer's. On returning to the hotel I write until dinner time. During the evening I play cards, billiards, dominoes or roulette. All games amuse and absorb me. When I am at the whist-table, for instance, nothing exists for me except the card combinations. These unexpected combinations, which vary *ad infinitum* cause me a surprise of which I never weary. This is a good example of atavism, as my father and grandfather were great gamblers. This distraction, in which there is no question of interest, refreshes my brain. Whilst at the green table, the characters in novels and comedies, all philosophical thoughts and troublesome questions vanish. As

soon as I go back to my room they all come to life again and I am sometimes obliged to work until a very late hour. I have not a moment for ruminating over the past, nor for thinking of the horrors of the old age which is approaching. Hotel life compels me to pay more attention to my person, to my dress, to be amiable, even-tempered, not to think of my weariness or slight ailments; in short it prevents me from getting lax, physically and morally.

*Cannes.*

When, in the evening, I see all these people of various races in the hotel rooms, I cannot believe that it is just due to chance or to their own will that they are here. Some of them come from very far away, from Chili, from San Francisco. Is it just to gossip, talk and play games that they have been gathered together under the same roof? No, it certainly is not. There must be under all this some very interesting weaving, some commencement of things, an exchange of life necessary to the progress of all. They all appear to belong to the same society, to the same civilization, and yet they represent different degrees of moral elevation. Three circles are constituted and reconstituted invariably: the English circle, the American circle, the French circle.

In the English circle the women knit long, ribbed stockings of the kind so dear to sportsmen, or gloves for the Newfoundland fishermen. They talk in a monotonous voice; their faces are grave and cold, but their eyes are soft. They play cards with a concentrated passion that is perfectly disciplined. In the French circle there is more light and vivacity. The women manufacture pretty little things in bright colours. They talk, not perhaps about very elevated subjects, but the conversation is kept up without flagging. The

game, whatever it may be, is played gaily, with an accompaniment of droll remarks. In the American circle there is more beauty, more elegance and youth. The women, most of them with large hats which are apparently riveted to their heads, and purses with gold meshes hanging round their wrists, chatter unceasingly. They play poker with an ardour that brings patches of colour to their cheeks. Some charming exotic women come and go among these groups. What fine races they represent! The setting of their eyes always amazes me. On their small-featured faces one sees the reflection of a kindly, childlike soul. The Russian and Polish women stand out in extraordinary relief. One feels their immense capabilities. In these modern surroundings, with their intense-looking expression, their enthusiasm, they seem to me curiously out-of-date. I always come back to the American women with pleasure and interest. When they talk French all their fine self-assurance vanishes. Their expression, their very voices soften, a something *naïve* is evolved from them, a something very young, which is, perhaps, the real basis of their soul. I owe much to them. Their activity has often stimulated my idleness. Through them I have, as it were, felt the ebullition of the life of their country. In the class which I call "Young America" I notice a growing nervosity, an extreme lassitude, a disgust of money even. One of them, after passing the winter at Naples, said to me: "How refreshing it is to meet people who are well-born and poor!" These extremely worldly women have a vacillating look in their eyes, the expression of hunted creatures. They come to rest themselves in the slower movement of our life, and then they start again, hurled afresh into the wild saraband, where they will end by falling down victims to nervous prostration. When I observe them I am not surprised

at the increasing number of divorces, at the social dislocation, proofs of which are given us in the newspapers. All this, however, only happens on the surface, and over a very limited extent. There is in the United States an admirable stratum of resistance, a class which we scarcely know, and of which we have no equivalent. The rigid principles, the indomitable faith that the emigrants from England and Holland took into the New World with their family Bible were like a kind of cement. It is thanks to this cement that their work of founders resisted the assaults of adventurers, and that it still resists the thrusts of the multitude greedy for money. This Puritan soul of the Pilgrim Fathers is not confined to the clan of their direct descendants, the famous Four Hundred. It is, perhaps, enfeebled there but it has penetrated the whole country — north, east, and west. It is predominant in Boston and in Philadelphia. It has created a kind of moral humus, thanks to which we have serious, high-minded men and women. When such men and women are three generations old they are what the Yankees call " our best people," and I always describe them as " Old America." In " Old America " divorces are rare and families very united. The women do not willingly leave their homes. They only come to Europe, as a rule, in order to learn, and most of them are highly cultured. The Puritan spirit causes their mentality to be somewhat limited and very *bourgeois* in its severity. It manifests itself still with them by an absence of taste, a contempt for dress. They are wanting in charm and in brilliancy, but they give an agreeable impression of sincerity and of purity. The question is whether Nature cannot give brilliancy to worthy people or whether she does not wish to do so.

I delight in bringing French and American women into contact with each other. In the most simple con-

versation their difference of character is evident. The other day I introduced a woman belonging to "Old America" to a provincial woman of Paris.

"Have you any children?" asked the French woman.

The face of the American woman lighted up prettily.

"Four," she replied, "and twelve grandchildren."

"Four children and twelve grandchildren and you are in Europe?"

"Oh, they don't need me."

"No, perhaps not; but if I were in your place I should need them."

"What for?"

This "what for" caused Madame de B—— a visible shock.

"I write to my children every night," continued Mrs. Wilson. "I tell them what I have done and what I have seen. My letter leaves every Wednesday. Each mail brings me news from one or the other of them. We are, therefore, in constant communication. God has given me excellent health and I ought to take advantage of it. There are so many things still to see!"

"What things?"

"Sweden, Norway — I am going there this summer. I went to Japan at the time of the chrysanthemums, and I must go there again when the cherry-trees are in blossom."

Oh, the expression of Madame de B——, of the left bank of the River Seine, on hearing this woman of fifty-five years of age, a woman with twelve grandchildren, talk of going back to Japan to see the cherry-trees in blossom. It amuses me whenever I think of it. Much she cared for Sweden, Norway and Japan. The French woman, like the Latin woman generally, is still entirely absorbed by man and maternity. When love is over she sees nothing else here on earth. When her children

marry she clings to them, endeavours to get back her son or her daughter, and is always in the way in the new home. Most of these women try to find consolation in the exercise of puerile religious devotions, or in some regular charitable work. All of them grow old very quickly.

The American woman prides herself in having found out the secret of not growing old. Her advice is never to lose interest in life, but, on the contrary, to draw from its best forces, to keep up with it, to learn all the time and not even to keep count of the years. She is scientifically right. The real fountain of youth is in our brain. If we keep up the activity of its cells this will accelerate the circulation of the blood, of the vital fluids, give brilliancy to the eyes, preserve the suppleness of the body, keep off illness and old age and even death. God grant that there may be some day in France grandmothers capable of going, like courageous bees, to seek afar beautiful sights and impressions — in a word, to get honey for their grandchildren.

*Cannes.*

I have never liked what is known by the pretentious name of the *Côte d' Azur*, and this fresh experience does not reconcile me with it. Unnatural heat and blinding light, a breath of *mistral* in the atmosphere, which sweeps away all mists, intensifies the blue of the sky and sea to a sombre indigo, and gives a disagreeable hardness to all lines. Verdure and flowers, it is true, but the silence of winter without the songs of the birds. The peasants kill the birds through ignorance and avarice. The sunsets are wonderful, but treacherous. One would like to stay out in order not to miss one single effect of the changing light, of that golden violet which no

human palette can render, but one is driven indoors. A peculiar humidity causes a deathly chill to run down one's back. The air is laden with visible and invisible enemies and in this pernicious air the mosquitoes, winged poison as they are, intoxicated with their love, dance their wild dance and take in, perhaps, a fresh provision of venom. I must own frankly that I prefer the sunsets of Paris. Though I do not like the South of France, I like the cosmopolitans one meets there. Beside the society people and the gay set, there are always a number of individuals who come there in search of oblivion or health, in search of a little physical or moral warmth. Something has been, or is now, going on within their soul.

About a week ago, an Englishman, who at once aroused my interest, arrived at the Hôtel Riche. He is about fifty-five or sixty years of age. His tall, upright figure gives him a robust appearance, but the leaden pallor of his face, his features which are being chiselled, as it were, from within, and his liquid eyes betray the work of destruction that is being accomplished within his fine-looking body. I had seen from the visitors' list that his name was Sir William Randolph. He was accompanied by his wife and, although he seemed to wish to keep aloof, I was sure that we should make each other's acquaintance. In the evening, when I was playing bridge, I met his gaze several times fixed on me with an expression of astonishment, and I noticed on his lips that irritating, humorous smile peculiar to Englishmen. This morning, as I was resting under the verandah after my walk in town, I saw him coming along from the far end of the Park. My sympathy went out involuntarily towards him and reached him in some invisible manner, for he came direct to my arm-chair.

"I do not know whether it is the correct thing to speak without an introduction to an authoress in order to thank her for the pleasure she has given me?"

"It may not be the correct thing, but it is very nice of you," I answered, amused at this general way of entering into conversation. I pointed to a chair and added: "You like novels, then?"

"When they are good, yes, just as I like a good cigar. I am not allowed to smoke, so I make up for that by reading novels. Don't you think it strange that a man should require stories and the theatre when he has life to look at?"

"No, for his faculties do not allow him to grasp things sufficiently. The novel and the theatre are not the mirror of life, they are life in the mirror. It is only there that he can see it, and, besides, he finds there the complete action which satisfies his innate desire to know the end of things."

Sir William Randolph looked at me in surprise.

"I think you have hit it," he said. "Your explanation seems to me very plausible."

"How did you come across my stories?" I asked curiously.

"As chance would have it, your publisher is my bookseller, and he sent me your two works to Algeria. I opened them with misgiving."

"Because they were by a French author, I suppose?"

"Precisely. French novelists have a great deal of talent, but they too often treat disagreeable subjects. This is a matter of regret not only to the 'hypocritical English,'" said Sir William Randolph, mischievously, "but to refined people in all countries."

"People do not write the novels they would like to write, that is very certain," I said. "My dream was

to publish stories about the humble classes, about animals, about a strong and simple kind of life. You have seen what I have written."

"I am not sorry, though. Your books contain so many thoughts, and a study of characters which has interested me keenly, although I have not very much sympathy with our American cousins."

"I should have been surprised if it had been otherwise," I said smiling.

"I have no prejudice against them, believe me. Their faults shock me, and my education prevents me from appreciating their extremely modern qualities. Judge for yourself. They are the only women in the world who willingly leave their husband and children, enjoy themselves, and are quite happy away from them."

"That is true, but have you ever thought that, if the conjugal bond were as close in their country as in ours, it would interfere with the action of the men and hinder their work? Do you not think that these women are the necessary agents of exchange between the New and the Old World, the unconscious vehicles of ideas and of impressions?"

"No; I have not a novelist's imagination."

"There is no imagination in that; it is scientifically true. The invisible cargo of an Atlantic liner is considerably more important than that which pays duty, but in quite another way."

Sir William looked at me an instant.

"You amaze me more and more. When my wife came and told me that you were Jean Noël, I did not think it possible."

"Because you thought I was too old to be a new author?"

"No, I could not believe that the person who had

stirred up ideas such as those which had struck me, could shuffle cards with such animation and be so absorbed in that abominable bridge."

"But the person is not the same," I exclaimed, in all good faith. "This one is Madame de Myères, a very frivolous woman, who would willingly finish her life playing bézique. Jean Noël was only born five years ago. He remained long enough in limbo, you see."

"That is why he is so vigorous. I am glad of it, for I intend waging war with him on many points."

"You are not a Francophobe, I hope?"

"No; I even have an instinctive liking for the French, but I do not always understand them. I do not understand them when they exclaim, after every check: 'We have been betrayed!' I do not understand them in defeat, when, instead of rallying round their government, instead of standing shoulder to shoulder, they quarrel and kill each other. With us, Napoleon might have avenged Waterloo. It was you who sent him to St. Helena."

"You are quite right."

"I did not understand the French in their way of treating Ferry, in the Boulanger affair, and still less in the Dreyfus affair. Their attitude at the time of our war with the Boers pained me, and had the same effect on other people. We had been attacked, and we were defeated at Majuba Hill, and we could not stop at that. All great nations have sins of conquest on their conscience, if, indeed, these be sins. Are you not keeping a certain little Malgache queen in exile?"

"Your country and mine are both accomplishing the work that is imposed upon us, that is all. But would you like me to give you the key to our character?"

"Ah, I should be delighted if you would."

"Well, then, the Saxon and Teutonic races, and their various branches, are masculine. The Latin, Slavonic, and Celtic races are feminine. The feminine element predominates in the French soul. Study our history and our literature, and you will find it there constantly, with all its defects and all its good qualities."

The face of Sir William lighted up.

"Upon my word," he exclaimed, "it must be that!"

"I have often visited England," I said, "and I regret that we should remain so obstinately foreign to each other."

"And yet, in your books, you have carefully excluded the Englishman from the field of your observations, I have noticed that."

"Well, you will not lose anything by waiting. I have a volume on your country in preparation."

"Oh, I shall enjoy that!"

"I have hesitated a hundred times, with pen in hand, before expressing an opinion. I have made it a point of honour to be fair, as I do not want to be found guilty of injustice or of partiality. At the same time I have tried to give you a clearer and truer idea of our character. I am sure that you have never crossed the threshold of a French house."

"Yes, I have. Three years ago Lady Randolph and I met the Lussons at the Hôtel Riche. They are charming people, with a daughter of eighteen. We were very soon on friendly terms with them, and one day, during the conversation, my wife, who is Irish, happened to mention that one of her cousins on her mother's side had married a Frenchman, named La Reynie. To our mutual amazement, we discovered that the said cousin was the grandmother of Madame de Lusson."

"Life has pleasant surprises for us sometimes."

"And cruel ones still more often. However that may be, this discovery brought about a very delightful friendship between us and our new acquaintances. They came and stayed with us for a month at Simley Hall, Staffordshire. We paid them a visit later on in Touraine. I really came into touch then with France, and saw more of your good qualities than I had yet seen. The Lussons' estate, the Commanderie de Rouziers, is about seven miles from Tours."

"The Commanderie de Rouziers!" I exclaimed, "Why, I know it!"

"Really?"

"An adorable house in Louis XIII style?"

"Exactly."

"The last ten years I have spent the month of October at Vouvray with some friends there. They pointed out the house to me on one of our excursions."

"How curious that is!" said Sir William Randolph. "We shall find yet that we have mutual ties."

"I should not be surprised, meetings in this world are often prepared from afar —"

At this moment the luncheon-bell rang and we rose. I held out my hand to my companion and said "*Au revoir.*"

"If you will allow me, I should like to introduce my wife this afternoon."

"With pleasure," I answered; "but to whom shall you introduce her — to Madame de Myères or to Jean Noël?"

Sir William looked at me, hesitated, and then, with a mocking smile, replied ——

"I will introduce her to Madame de Myères, for she plays whist and dominoes. I will keep Jean Noël for myself, if you will allow me to do so."

"Very well," I answered, and upon this we separated

and I went upstairs to my room rather agitated, with that sensation which always warn me, now that something has happened or is about to happen. Was it in order to come into contact with this mind that I had been sent to Cannes?

*Cannes.*

Well, we are friends now, the Randolphs and I! Friends! What a delightful phenomenon it is, this friendship of human creatures! For a long time they walk along different paths, then they cross suddenly towards the same point and meet each other. A hundred circumstances bring them together with significant persistance. A photographic transmission of images and impressions takes place between their brains. Each of them puts a little of his substance into the soul of the other, enough to produce mutual vibrations, more or less profound, of course. The Randolphs, of whose very existence I was unaware a fortnight ago, now know my mother, that luminous figure, the memory of which brightens my life. They know my father, too, and my friends, dead and living. I have talked to them of my childhood, of my youth and, incidentally, of my marriage. With that intuition of refined natures, they felt that this chapter contained something painful, and they did not want me to dwell on it. I feel really that from henceforth anything that may happen to me, either for good or for evil, would not be indifferent to them. This is to me both pleasant and embarrassing, for I have a jealous love of my solitude and my independence. They, on their side, have told me about their life. They have spoken of their eldest son, who died in India, of their married daughter, of their three grand-children, of their son Claude, and of Simley Hall, their old family home. I even know the names of all their dogs. Sir

William is at the head of an important colliery company, and owns coal mines in Staffordshire. Few men have given me such an impression of will-power. It seems as though strength emanates from his person. When I walk with him I have a distinct sensation of protection. He must have been very authoritative, a veritable lord and master for his wife and for all those connected with him. The horrible affection of the heart, which is killing him, has evidently softened and transformed his character. At times the sudden inflation of his nostrils, the instantaneous rigidity of his lips, betray the old man in him. He reminds me of a dying lion. There is in him that manly spirituality which is created in the Englishman by the Bible. It is very different from the keen and sensual spirituality which drives certain Frenchmen into the cloister or to religious devotion. Sir William loves Nature, flowers and animals passionately. Astronomy is his favourite study. He has had an observatory built on his estate. In the evening when we are strolling about under the verandah, his gaze is always exploring the sky. Unless I am mistaken, there was something particularly sad about the death of his eldest son. It weighs on his mind in a way that is unusual.

The day before yesterday I do not remember what we were discussing, but I happened to say, as I frequently do, "How beautiful life is!" He turned abruptly towards me with his features contracted and in a sarcastic tone said:

"Life beautiful! With all its baseness, its incurable ills. Ah no, it is not beautiful. It is very praiseworthy, that we should refrain from cursing it. Tell me, how do you look upon life?"

"As a wonderful assembly of forces, all contributing to the universal work. We have no right, either, to

judge it, as we do not know anything about its continuation or its end. When I see or think of any of the horrors here below, I immediately think of something that has been improved, and I say to myself, *this* will become *that*. Beauty is ugliness corrected, virtue is vice purified. By what processes, Nature alone knows."

"Oh well, I simply believe that we all have the instincts of brutes, against which we have to struggle unceasingly. There is, I must confess, a certain pleasure in the strife."

"That is very English!"

"Do you also happen to admire mankind?"

"Certainly I do. Whether a man be wielding a broom or a sceptre I see in him the agent, the instrument of God. I consider that the very humblest is as necessary as I am myself. When once he is on the ladder of life he never comes off it. He may fall down a few steps or even to the bottom, but he will rise again and will be urged on inevitably towards perfection and happiness."

"Where have you obtained your information?"

"From science."

"Science, ah, that is good!"

"Well, science has opened out infinite perspectives to me. I believe now in the promises of the beatitudes, which used to make me smile in my ignorance. Logically they must be realised. 'Those who are hungry will be filled' I am sure of that."

"Amen!" said my companion, with a long sigh.

Sir William's mockery is particularly cutting. He is endowed with that faculty which is termed humour, by means of which he sees the comic side of things at once. He adores chaffing. I, too, take great pleasure in that, and we do not spare each other. My aptitude in passing from a frivolous to a very grave subject is a constant

astonishment to him. I am the first French woman with whom he has been able to exchange ideas. I see that he is perplexed every minute. The day before yesterday he came and sat with me under the verandah in the morning.

"I would wager that you are superstitious," he began, as a kind of attack.

"Terribly so," I replied.

"You do not like to see the new moon through the window?"

"Oh, no."

"And you believe in the evil eye?"

"I believe that the meeting certain persons may coincide with happy events, and the meeting others with unhappy events! Are we not constantly the instruments of joy or of sorrow for each other, the messengers of good or evil fortune?"

"Superstitious temperaments are to be found at the two extremities of the human ladder: with those who are governed by instinct, and with those whose sensitive organ is very keen."

"Ah, well, I caught this disease in Italy. By constantly hearing 'that is lucky' or 'that is unlucky,' one finally gets impressed. Do you not believe in presentiments?"

"Unfortunately I cannot help believing in them. When my son started for India, I felt, as we shook hands for the last time, that I should not see him again. He himself, when the boat was in the roadstead, asked his mother for an old song that she used to sing to him when he was a child."

"Something happened to me, too," I said, "which was very curious. When I was staying at Rome with M. de Myères the very year of his death, I went to see the Corsini chapel at St. Jean's of Latran, where there is a *Pietà* that I shall never forget. It does not represent

a virgin above and beyond all humanity, but a simple woman holding, across her knees, the body of a man who had been racked by torture and was now lifeless, the body of a man whom she had loved or to whom she had given birth. The group is lighted up by a reflection which leaves the crypt in shadow. This grief, intensified by the light, was communicated magnetically to me, although I was neither a believer nor a mother. I broke into sobs, to the great surprise of the other visitors. The more I wiped away my tears the more they flowed. Six months later my husband was taken from me. Whilst, in my anguish, I was preparing him for the grave, the *Pietà* group came again to my mind, and I saw myself in the same attitude as the woman of the Corsini chapel. Sometimes, as you say so truly in English, 'Coming events cast their shadows before them.'"

"That is quite certain."

"Is not that a proof that our destiny is fore-ordained?"

"A proof, yes, but it may be a fallacious one," and, turning to me with his nostrils quivering with mischief, he added:

"The prettiest proof would be for love to be a fluid, as you affirm in your last novel. We have *felt* it, both you and I, formerly — I should like to *see* it now."

"To see it!" I exclaimed. "But what do you see here below? Only things. Have you ever seen an idea, a thought, a sentiment?"

Sir William Randolph's face expressed a sudden bewilderment.

"Why, no, I never even took into account that I had not seen them."

"And yet they lead you along, these great Invisibles. They overturn the world; they make it live, act —"

"Was it between two games of bridge that you discovered that?"

"Perhaps so: it was certainly not *during* the game."

"I suppose not. Joking apart, though, you must have thought a great deal."

"What is there to do, on the branch, unless one thinks? Jean Noël has acquired a little of the wisdom that you attribute to old owls. He has become 'as wise as an owl.'"

As though these daily conversations did not make us intimate enough, the Randolphs invited me every afternoon to share their carriage, and we have been to all the suburbs of Cannes together. The spring is now very far advanced. The blue tones get softer each day, and there is more gold in the violet shades of the setting sun. Those birds which have escaped the stupid massacre attempted on them, and also those which have come back from afar, are beginning to sing of love. Yesterday, on ascending a hill, I had the sensation of entering a bath of azure and of vibrating light. The real season of the Riviera ought to be the summer.

On returning from the drive Lady Randolph usually prepares some excellent tea for us. Her invalid then takes a little rest, and she and I play piquet until the dinner hour. She is the true type of the gentle, submissive English wife. She recognizes, with touching humility, the great superiority of her husband. She is delighted that he finds some pleasure in talking to me. And these new friends who have, as it were, adopted me are leaving to-morrow. I regret this very much, and should like to have returned to Paris at the same time as they do, but my room at the hotel will not be free for a week.

This evening after dinner, as we were walking up and

down for the last time under the verandah, Sir William Randolph asked me whether I intended to go to England in June.

"Oh, no," I answered, "I am going to Touraine to see the springtime there. It is a fancy I have had for some time."

"Would you not give up this fancy for my sake?" he asked. "My wife intends asking you to come and spend some weeks at Simley Hall."

"Next year, if you like," I answered.

He stopped short and turned towards me.

"Do I look like a man who will live another year?" he asked me in a bitter tone.

A pang went through my heart, but I had strength enough to hide my feelings.

"You have a constitution capable of resisting disease for a long time, and of even conquering it," I said.

"Do you think so?" he observed, with sorrowful irony. "I am not of your opinion. Anyhow, I certainly have the right to be a despot. I should like to show you my favourite stars, the little village I have built, Simley and its old trees. Let me have this pleasure, and come in June."

Some inward force obliged me to yield, and I answered:

"Very well, then — June. You see there is no need to press me much."

An expression of joy lighted up the face of Sir William.

"You are kindness itself," he said. "We will invite the Lussons as we pass through Paris, so that your visit will be more pleasant. We shall have young people — my son, my daughter and grandchildren. Madame de Myères will not be short of partners for bridge, and Jean Noël will be able to study an English family, quite of

the old school. Such families are disappearing fast, you know. Altogether, we shall do our best to entertain you."

"I do not doubt it, and I expect to be very happy."

"Well, then, we can count on you?"

"Certainly."

"Thank you; I suppose a Frenchman would kiss your hand," said Sir William with a flash of mockery in his eyes, "but there are some things that John Bull cannot do, and this is one of them."

And so my compass now points to England. My visit to Cannes has changed all my plans. Was that the object of it?

*Cannes.*

I feel very lonely now. The season is nearly at an end, and our number diminishes every day. The *table d'hôte* is, after all, the vulgar image of what the poet Gilbert called "The Banquet of Life." People disappear and whilst the absence of one person causes a sensation of emptiness, which is often very sorrowful, the absence of another does not affect one at all. This fact, although commonplace, is curious. It indicates, in my opinion, the existence of an isolating fluid. It is, thanks to this fluid, that we can pass through a crowd without mixing with it, without coming into touch with it. Otherwise, we should fall over each other like card houses, or we should embrace each other or tear each other to pieces. Ah, what would be left of us if it were not for this invisible barrier! It seems to me that here on earth beings are grouped into systems. When, at the turning-points of our road, we happen to come across people unexpectedly, whom we have seen elsewhere, we say, How small the world is! It is not the world that is small, but our respective orbits, circles or ellipses.

Although separated by considerable distance, by obstacles of all kinds, the individuals who belong to the same system meet always at a given moment and for unknown ends. Hidden affinities, conducting wires unite or re-unite them, they have an influence on each other, affect each other mutually, and, however fugitive may be the contact, the glance or pressure of the hand, it leaves an impression and produces the vibrations necessary to life in common. When the time comes to say farewell, we feel the bonds that have been formed without our knowledge. The breaking of them is like the tearing away of a thousand small inward fibres. The railway train makes departures particularly painful. It looks as implacable as Fate, as Nature. We understand that no human cry will make it slacken its pace, and that it will not give us back those it takes away. A carriage, on the contrary, leaves us with a vague hope, a possibility of return.

Towards the close of the season, either at a watering place or elsewhere, whenever I hear people talking of their home, I realise my own uprootal. It causes me a slight shock, some sorrow, and a kind of humiliation. At holiday times, too, I feel the lack of a home. Its warmth is wanting, and I shiver inwardly, but when such moments are over I am glad to be " on the branch."

## III

### PARIS

*Hôtel de Castiglione, Paris.*

On arriving at the station I had no family nor even any servants to meet me. There was the little yellow omnibus of the Lyons-Mediterranean Co., and after that the hotel, everyone's abode, and a bedroom which had belonged to someone else yesterday. I should like to keep my beloved bedroom and lock it up when I go away. However, I shall soon make it mine again. It is curious that, although it has been occupied by strangers for several months, as soon as I go into it again it once more becomes familiar, and it seems as though I find some of my own life there. I have thought so many thoughts in that room, had so many memories and meditated so much there. Surely, all that must leave traces. The table invites me to work as though it were a medium's table. There is no place where my brain is so active, no place where I feel such keen inspiration. It is in this room, no doubt, that I am to accomplish the work of my last days. I will start on it, at any rate, gaily.

I am always glad to get back to Paris again. It is the one spot on this planet that I shall regret the most. I love it as one loves an individual, and I quite agree with the person who says that there are certain landscapes one would like to kiss. I remember one evening, in the Tuileries, looking at the beautiful view of the Arc de Triomphe, at the end of the Avenue des Champs Elysées,

with the setting sun adding its glory to the scene, and I stretched out my arms in an irresistible impulse of affection. In my opinion the beauty of Paris is not due merely to its topography, its well-cut streets, its monuments, its elegance, but also to its sky, its atmosphere, its soul. Its sky has tones of infinite delicacy and variety, it is never too low nor too high; its atmosphere is light, its mists bluish, its haze of pearl-grey. Its soul is young, gay, enthusiastic, idealistic, passionate and violent; its vibrations have a champagne-like effect on the air, and communicates to everyone a kind of exultation and sprightliness. There is no city more misunderstood and more slandered. On throwing a penny into certain Cinematographs, they instantly give a picture of the *Moulin Rouge*, or of other similar places. In the same way, in the majority of foreign masculine brains, the word Paris suggests the picture of a half-naked woman with her feet up in the air, or else the exhibitions of the café-concert. The feminine mind conjures up furbelows and jewellery, together with forbidden fruit of all flavours. It is not in the penny Cinematographs that one ought to see Paris, as they cannot register its higher life, and the higher life of Paris is intense. People may enjoy themselves more there, but they pray more there, and they love and work more there, too. Paris is for me an inexhaustible source of impressions. Formerly it used to amuse me, but now it interests me profoundly. In December and in January, I like to go into the Rue de la Paix, between five and six o'clock, the hour of flirtation and of the amorous aperitive. The whole length of the dazzling shop-windows *Vie Parisienne* personages file by, Lavedan's characters, those who " cultivate their beautiful physique." One recognises the hats, the stockings, the petticoats, etc. The very sight of them is amusing. All these society women and these demi-mondaines are

more interesting than would be imagined. They are very courageous, and they suffer just as you do, and just as we all do. Their small minds writhe with envy and jealousy, and are pierced with pin-pricks, and nothing reaches the heart so surely and so thoroughly as pin-pricks. In spite of the brilliancy of their ornaments, I have surprised expressions of despair, and I have seen spasms of grief end in smiles. Every evening these people come to this part of Paris, as though drawn thither by the attraction of diamonds and precious stones, and all kinds of feelings are aroused in their minds. They meet each other here, and there are greetings and merry outbursts of laughter. This human fluttering about always reminds me of the dance of mosquitoes. It is not so prolific, but it must come into the same order of facts. It lasts for an hour, and then everyone disappears; the street looks as usual, the scene is played out, and I always have an idea that something has happened.

Twenty yards further on something else happens, something immense, colossal. At the absinthe hour, the five o'clock of the frequenters of the Boulevards, from the Madeleine to the Rue Drouot, the crowd becomes compact, brought thither no one knows how, from the four cardinal points of the capital. Hands meet and grasp each other. There is a rapid, extraordinary transmission of thought, of ideas, opinions and sentiments. Business affairs are arranged, resulting in the ruin of one man and the fortune of another. This person is praised and that one run down. Words are uttered which will have unforeseen consequences, either dire or happy ones. The germs of disease or of death are absorbed. Love, hatred, jealousy, all meet here, and this lasts an hour at the most, then everyone separates, and the inevitable work has been accomplished. I am lost in admiration in face of the Power which directs this human tide, which

knows how each of the thoughts of these thousands of brains and each of all the movements of these bodies will end. Sometimes, when passing through a crowd, I see partially, as though by the gleam of a flash of lightning, the work that is being done, and I stop short, dazed as it were, frightened, and then I hurry away quickly. Life is always in fusion throughout the entire universe; but in certain places, at certain moments, fixed or not fixed, a still fiercer ebullition takes place and this is destined to accelerate the march of humanity; it is, perhaps, a process of clarification. And so it is that in this vat called Paris, there are at intervals, at fixed times, various ebullitions. In the Churches there is an ebullition of ideality; in the universities and the laboratories an ebullition of thought. In Parliament there is an ebullition of what? — alas! not of patriotism, but of political passions, of ambition and of envy. At the *Moulin Rouge*, and places of that kind, there is an ebullition of inferior and sensual life. In the districts inhabited by the working classes there is an ebullition of material forces, of courage, spite, love, hatred, and especially of pain and grief. The latter is the most prolonged, the most interesting, too. Yes, it really seems to me that I know "where to sit down in order to see life," for I see it all the time more beautiful and more grand — oh, so grand, that I am rather in awe, and yet I have confidence.

*Paris.*

When one comes into contact with the upper ten, one is out of love with all humanity, but when one observes the people one is reconciled again to humanity. That is the conclusion to which I came this afternoon. The *Figaro* announced a Charity Bazaar at the house of the D——'s. All the organisers, belonging to our best aristocracy, were to dress in the costumes peculiar to our old

provinces. This was the chief attraction. The reconstitution of the peasantry in one of those beautiful eighteenth century mansions, which are my delight, could not fail to tempt me irresistibly. I therefore went to the Rue de Varennes. At the entrance, the Marquis d'A——, wearing a wide hat, an embroidered waistcoat, a short velvet coat, knee-breeches, gaiters and thick shoes, received my two-franc piece and, beside allowing me to pass, favoured me with a gracious smile, as a well-born peasant had to be generous.

I crossed the hall and passed through a long suite of reception-rooms. The French windows opened on to one of those old gardens only to be seen now in the Faubourg Saint-Germain. There was a background of large trees and walls covered with ivy, a badly cut lawn, bushes of rhododendrons and lilac, flowers along the borders and pebbled paths.

In the midst of this scenery, which the springtime made more modern, were small shops, rustic pavilions, an orchestra of supposed gipsies, groups of women in light dresses, the effect of which was toned down by the sombre costumes of the dowagers and the black cassocks of the priests. Standing out in relief were the costumes of Brittany, Anjou and Poitou, worn by girls and young men, who were moving to and fro, with the evident intention of showing themselves off, full face, profile and back view. I went to Mademoiselle de C—— and asked for a cup of tea. She waited on me very graciously. In the dairy a superb cow was installed. Well groomed for the occasion, its coat shone more brilliantly than a society man's hat. It appeared to be hypnotised by the aristocratic surroundings in which it found itself. Only to think of being received in the Faubourg Saint-Germain. (It was for the sake of its milk, it is true; but, all the same, what an honour!) Even a beast may expect any-

thing here below. This one stood there motionless, neither ruminating nor eating, but gazing at these imitation peasants with so bewildered and so anxious an expression that I could not help laughing. I should not be surprised if the shock had dried up its milk.

I strolled about rather a long time in the crowd. Among the young men, under many of the Breton or Vendean hats, I saw some interesting faces of the old type, faces that were extremely refined, but in which there was no sign of strength. The listless expression, the slow movements, the languid bearing of these young men betrayed a lack of vitality which must make them unfit for any struggle. Oh, there is no doubt about it, other men than these are needed to guide the ship of France past the modern rocks. I understood better than I had ever done why the command had been taken from them. I have no doubt but that in the moment of danger the fire of heroism would shine in these blue or brown eyes, that these slender bodies would strain themselves to the very death in an effort of hereditary bravery to defend their country, but they do not know how to *live* for her; and in broad daylight, parading about in this old garden, dressed up in fancy costumes, these *grand seigneurs* cut a rather sorry figure. After the young men, I looked at the girls. With them there was more distinction than beauty, no individuality, very dreamy eyes, but it was an anæmic dreaminess. No freshness, no light in their faces, a something almost old-looking. All of them reminded me of convent flowers. As to the women between fifty and sixty years of age, it was rather painful to see them. Enormous, shapeless and badly dressed, it was evident that Court etiquette had not disciplined them, and that they were ignorant or disdainful of the laws of modern hygiene. The carriage of their heads was fine, a shade of melancholy softened their severe and rigid expression.

There was an air of moral and aristocratic authority about them which prevented anyone from taking them for ordinary middle-class women. I glanced round in search of the American duchesses and countesses. It seemed as though they ought to stand out in relief in this dull, Old World, *milieu*. Strangely enough, they almost mingled with it. They have copied its tone and manners, adopted its prejudices, forsworn their own gods, either through snobbishness or under the influence of suggestion, but they have not yet succeeded in acquiring its charm. They are stiff and unnatural, veritable counterfeits. I do not believe, though, that they have been drawn into this Old World for the mere gratification of their vanity, but to bring into it elements of evolution. They are probably to transmit to their children the new spirit, modified so that it may be more easily absorbed. The working of Providence is so marvellously profound.

What was so comic and characteristic in this Charity Bazaar was that everyone appeared to be attending to something else. The Mothers of the Church talked with their spiritual director, the young people flirted. The stall-holders forgot to make the most of the articles for sale. They talked to each other, left their counters in order to go and have a word with first one person and then another. The receipts must have suffered, for money rarely comes by itself into the treasury of the poor. In a corner, though, there was a sale by auction of a quantity of extraordinary objects. The aristocratic auctioneer was droll, but one expected still more from him. He was a descendant of one of the most brilliant and witty men of the eighteenth century, and it was a case of *Noblesse oblige*. Perhaps, though, all that he needed was a little more training. A few women of the upper middle class suddenly appeared in the old garden. Their elegance, enhanced by jewellery, their modernity

made a striking contrast. They took a few turns along the garden paths, whispering, laughing, exchanging smiles, examining people and things with visible curiosity. They bought right and left, most generously, with a certain ostentation, and then they disappeared. They probably thought that it was better than this at home. Yes, it may have been better, but not as good, perhaps.

A Royal Highness honoured the bazaar with his presence. All homage was paid to him. The young men escorted him about and the Dowagers made him Court reverences. It was as though we had returned to the days of His Majesty, Louis Phillippe, or farther back even. The men took off their peasants' hats with that graceful movement of the left hand which they had inherited from their ancestors of beplumed hats. They kissed the womens' hands, bent the knee before them, when offering them lottery tickets, with a naturalness and grace in which something of the olden times lived again. The whole of the afternoon I had the sensation of the past, and this sensation was singularly agreeable, infinitely restful.

At dinner, that evening, the hotel dining-room was full of American women, most of them very pretty and dressed charmingly. Some of them had been to Versailles, Fontainebleau, the races, and others were going to the Opera. The husbands were in America, of course, and, with the sense they have of their right to freedom and amusement, these women were "having a good time," as they say in their child-like way. Were they happier than their sisters, the duchesses and countesses of the Faubourg Saint-Germain? The scales for weighing human happiness are in the hands of God alone. I compared, in my mind, the retrospective picture I had seen in the Rue de Varennes with the one I had before my eyes, and I realised the superior value of the former one. It had re-

quired centuries to produce the harmony which had charmed me, and even that lack of moral vigour which had saddened me. The second scene was like a water-colour sketch, quickly and vigorously washed in, giving a vivid impression of life and youth. In each of these pictures one could follow the thought and recognise the hand of the Master. In order to follow that thought and to see the hand, it had been really necessary for me to be placed "on the branch."

*Paris.*

Since my return to Paris I have noticed that the circle of my life has become considerably smaller. Absorbed beyond measure by my last novel, I refused invitation after invitation, left a number of letters unanswered, neglected to return visits, in a word, failed in all my social duties. My physical activity has also slackened. Restaurant dinners, theatres, driving in the Bois, all tempt me less and less. For the first time the Salon has left me indifferent. Is it really old age that has come upon me? Paris life is so intense that one feels it, according to one's affinities, without taking part in it. The waves of it come as far as my room and communicate to me the impression of a social or artistic *fête*. I see the reunions of Auteuil, of Bagatelle, the polo matches, feminine figures, light dresses standing out against the green of the lawns with a clearness which satisfies me and encourages my idleness. I live on the effluvium of things now-a-days. This new state of mind has made too much emptiness around me, and this causes me some sadness. It is so much like the end! Madame de Myères has become a stranger in her own country. Jean Noël lives apart from the literary world and, between the two, they have not the social position of a retired grocer.

It is only the last few years that I have noticed the

help that Providence gives us. In my hours of extreme weariness, someone or something has always been sent to me to reanimate or to encourage me. Sometimes it has been a few words from one of my unknown readers. A "bravo" even came to me from the extreme limits of Alaska. Sometimes it has been the reappearance in my orbit of a person whom I like, and sometimes flowers have been sent me. In one of my bad moments, at my table in the hotel, I looked up and met the kind, intelligent eyes of two American women who had arrived the evening before. A current of sympathy was at once established between us. By means of that apparatus for wireless telegraphy, which we have behind our foreheads, we entered into communication with each other, we exchanged smiles and then words, the inevitable *liaison* was made, and this *liaison* has warmed my life again with real friendship. There is the invitation of the Randolphs now. It has just come in time. I feel the need of a rest from the hotel, of coming down a little from the branch. It seems to me that I have cramp in my limbs and in my heart. I want to see some children, to stroke some animals, to hear the songs of birds, the purring of cats, to breathe the perfume of living flowers . . . I have an infinite need of plenty of air and space. I shall have all that at Simley Hall, and I am enjoying it in advance.

I leave Paris to-morrow. It is extraordinary that the unmooring of a poor little barque like mine should require so much effort and movement. I am always surprised at the amount of trifles that a human being can accumulate. Papers, cards, bills, odds and ends, pieces of lace and of ribbon increase with incredible rapidity. It is all in vain that I destroy, burn, give away, something always remains at the moment of my departure. A few years ago I owned five trunks; I have now only three — my inseparable one, and then the two which I

leave at the hotel. This simplification delights me; I experience a curious pleasure in throwing out ballast. I am more of a grasshopper than an ant. I admire the American women who, uprooted as I am, without children, without home (and there are legions of them), go on buying all along their solitary road a quantity of things which "fascinate them," as they say: old ivories, valuable laces, old jewellery. They fill case after case with these things, and frequently do not see them again but deposit them with — their banker! It evidently is not for themselves that they forage. The objects that they collect are destined to delight other eyes, to produce the necessary impressions in other brains, but in whose? How interesting it would be to be able to follow, for rather a longer time, human work. And what about mine? It is not for my own pleasure that I transcribe these thoughts which are elaborated slowly and painfully in my mind. The germ of them comes from very far off, perhaps. What life will come forth from these parcels of my life? It is annoying not to see all this at once. I know at least that I shall not die, and I begin to suspect that I have been living a long time. And yet there are people who think life stupid! Ah, well, they have sight, but not vision. This latter came to me late, and only after a series of very painful operations. I no longer pity myself, as it was well worth all I suffered.

## IV

### ENGLAND

*Simley Hall, Staffordshire.*

Sir William Randolph came purposely to London to fetch me. He was waiting for me at Charing Cross. Ah, the cruel heart disease has not stopped in its progress! It has refined his features still more and made his limbs thinner. All my self-control was necessary in order that he should not guess the painful impression made on me. He appeared very glad to see me again, and when we shook hands a transmission of warm friendship took place. Sir William took me at once to the Great Western Hotel, the *Terminus* of Paddington Station, from whence we started at two o'clock the following day for Staffordshire. Simley Hall is near Wolverhampton, in a zone of verdure in the very heart of what is known as the Black Country, the land of iron-works and coal-mines. After passing Oxford, the mist became gradually thicker, and at Birmingham it was a yellow fog, into which the tall furnaces threw out what looked like will-o'-the-wisps. In a meadow, with wretched huts scattered about, and heaps of rubbish, a little boy was trying to fly a kite. It floated about a few yards from the ground without being able to rise. It was infinitely pathetic. Sir William had the same impression, and pointed to it with his finger.

"A symbol of us Englishmen, is it not?" he asked,

with his caustic smile. "You see it is not easy to rise in our ambient air."

"You should cultivate the ascensional force more, and the force of expansion less," I replied, carried away by my love of teasing.

"Well hit!" exclaimed my companion gaily. "You have commenced Franco-English hostilities, remember that."

As we approached Wolverhampton the atmosphere became clearer and lighter. At the station we found a victoria, drawn by a pair of fine horses which, with a quick, rhythmic step went along a road with hedges on each side, and a slight incline, then a long avenue of beech-trees until it landed us in front of the porch of Simley Hall. There Lady Randolph, her son-in-law, her daughter, her three grandchildren, two fox terriers and a collie gave me an affectionate welcome and, surrounded by these kind hosts, I sat down to tea, which was served in the hall. I was treated at once as one of the family.

Simley is an old English home, the principal lines of which are Gothic, but in which many of the windows have been enlarged in order to have more air and sunshine. It is almost entirely covered with ivy, surrounded by magnificent cedars, velvety lawns, flowers, and built in the midst of an immense park. It is a nest in which the same family has lived, continued and been renewed for more than two hundred years. And I am invited here, room has been made for me, an unknown woman, met at the hotel. I always try now to find out the object of Providence. It is far-off, invisible, beyond us, perhaps. In this particular case I have not even a notion about it.

The interior of Simley is both luxurious and simple. The furniture of old mahogany and old oak, covered

with Utrecht velvet or tapestry, the Flemish pictures, the fine library, the massive silver, give one the impression of intense respectability, of security even. There are long corridors, windows with shutters, deep recesses, delicious nooks. Sir William's illness and the death of the eldest son throw a shadow of sadness over the whole dwelling. The portrait of the latter is in the father's study and underneath it, hung horizontally, is the sword which his hand will never again draw from the sheath. At the far end of the park is the observatory, where my host spends part of the tranquil nights, not only, I am sure, to make mathematical calculations, but to meditate as a poet and philosopher. I had never imagined a building so scientifically fitted up. It has a movable roof, and the telescope is better than the ordinary instrument of an amateur. The stables at Simley are luxuriously supplied with horses. Besides these, there are the children's ponies and donkeys. The kennel is organised with a care which shows a thorough comprehension of the canine race. In the meadows confining the park, little brown Jersey cows graze all day, and not far away is to be seen the thatched roof of a very old farm. The children have shown me, in one corner of the park, the animal's cemetery. There are dogs, cats and birds, each one with its tombstone, on which is its name and a few words to its memory. Why should they be forgotten, the creatures which have loved us, which have brightened the home? All these things together give the impression of a simple, healthy life, the sight of which refreshes the eyes and heart.

The state of Sir William's health has necessarily limited the Simley hospitality. To the great regret of my hosts, the Lussons were not able to come to England this year. The visit of Mrs. Loftus, the daughter of the house, was arranged to be at the same time

as mine. She is a true English beauty, not delicate and languid, but healthy and active. She adores the country, sports and animals. One feels in her, as in her father, a latent power, a something which inspires confidence. Mr. Loftus is the type of the young English squire, of good birth, fair, pink and substantial, a man who at eighty years of age will have thick white hair, fine red cheeks, bright eyes, and who will sit upright in his saddle until his last day, and only be unhorsed by death. As to Claude Randolph, he won my heart at once. I divined in him a francophile mentality. He will neither be a thinker nor a philosopher, but he will have an understanding of life, a gift which I put above all others. He has a splendid physique, and he possesses a fund of gaiety which makes him very amusing. As a special sign, which ought to be noted because of its increasing rarity among young Englishmen, he does not talk to women with his hands in his pockets, and he takes the trouble to open the door for them. Mentally I gave a good mark to Lady Randolph, for whether a man is well or badly brought up depends on his mother.

They are old-fashioned at Simley Hall, as Sir William said. There are family prayers and a chapter read from the Bible, morning and evening, and my host carves the meat at table. I always enter with great ease into the circle of English life, thanks to the discipline and freedom to be found there. At half past seven a neat housemaid, with down-cast eyes according to rule, brings me an early cup of tea. At nine o'clock I sit down at table with the family, and a substantial breakfast is served, a breakfast consisting of eggs, of that fried bacon which sharpens the appetite, of fish, cold meats, tea and coffee. It is a very pleasant meal. One opens one's letters and newspapers, the news is cir-

culated and the programme of the day arranged. The hosts then attend to their own affairs, the guests go into the morning room or out for a walk. I generally go into the park and join the children as their big friend, and we visit the animals together. A round hut has been assigned to me as my study. It is a summer-house, furnished with a table and a round bench which has been supplied with a red cushion in my honour. I take my books and papers there. The windows in it look on to the meadow with the pretty brown cows, whose milk I drink copiously. When I leave the door open, robins, blackbirds, warblers, tomtits, wrens and even partridges approach curiously, put their little heads on one side as though to see me better, and seem to be saying: "Who are you?" I talk to them and they all appear to be sensitive to the endearment in the tone of my voice. They are helped to live during the winter; in the spring they make their nests in the hospitable parks, and during the summer they pay their benefactors in bird-money with songs and melodies. No one could imagine the inward joy which this procession of visitors gives me. At half-past eleven a maid arrives with a cup of *Benger's Food*, one of the nutritive preparations which are English specialties. Sir William comes to see me at about half-past twelve. We go and take a stroll in the kitchen garden, in the hot houses where the grapes, peaches and apricots are ripening. After luncheon, at half-past one, everyone goes to rest for a short or long time, according to the afternoon's programme. For some there is a drive, for the others golf, tennis, garden-parties. Tea is served at five o'clock in the hall or else in the garden among the flowers. There are always unexpected guests. After tea, which sometimes lasts a long while, one goes to one's room and does not come down until the sec-

ond dinner-bell. In the evening there are games at whist, bridge and billiards. At eleven o'clock the happy day is over for everyone. No one presses you to do this or that, you are not obliged to be entertained, but you are surrounded with a tactful solicitude that is absolutely delicious. At Simley Hall I feel as though I am carried along by waves. The best spare room is given to me, and it has a magnificent view of the park and the distant hills. The classical English four-post bed and the old furniture give it a severe look, singularly warm and comfortable though. Sir William had remembered hearing me say at Cannes that it was my lot to find more or less rickety writing tables everywhere I went. He had had a large, firm one prepared for me, and the day of my arrival I found on it a bouquet of those roses which are named after my country. I was rather surprised to see here and there, in the bedrooms, in the library and on the landings, Scripture texts. Formerly in all the English railway stations there used to be such texts, but they are now replaced by advertisements in many colours. Opposite to my bed I have the words "Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you." Between the two windows: "Blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed." Above a bracket filled with books: "To the Jews first." What was it? The Divine words, the good tidings? Why, yes, Jesus was Semitic and He was thinking of his brethren. We Christians always forget His origin, and then when something happens to remind us of it we are amazed. I smiled on seeing all around me these pieces of cardboard with Gothic letters, and now this morning under the suggestion of these words: "Walk while ye have the light," my movements became almost rapid. I hurried as though I really feared to be overtaken by the darkness. This

trifling phenomenon gave me food for reflection and the conclusion of it was that we know nothing — nothing yet.

*Simley Hall.*

Ever since I arrived here, a week ago, the summer nights, generally so beautiful in England, have been, as though on purpose, overcast. Now that I have a good telescope at my disposal I have no stars. Sir William is as disappointed as I am. Between the showers I have been taken to the places nearby. They are remarkably pretty. England has, I fancy, the whole scale of greens. In the dark green of this Staffordshire landscape there is a great deal of yellow. This shade is felt even in the light. That is my impression at least. Wolverhampton, the little town in the neighbourhood of Simley, owes its growing prosperity to the manufacture of bicycles. Within the last forty years it has been almost entirely rebuilt with those red bricks which now give to the English panoramas a warmer and more cheerful aspect. All round the town radiate the various roads, with small houses and villas gay with flowers. Then there are the fine dwellings standing alone, surrounded by parks, in which the ancient trees of old England display their centenarian majesty. At the foot of the hill on which Simley Hall is built is an ideal village, the creation of Sir William. In the centre is a very ancient church with its graveyard, then some new cottages, but with the large roofs of former days, windows with several shutters, lovely porches, cottages, surrounded with gardens festooned with verdure, such as queens must often envy. The school, the post-office, the police-station even, are all adorned with flowers. The Club-house, a meeting place for the farmers and workmen of the neighbourhood, is

covered with creepers. Sir William has supplied each of these habitations with everything that is necessary for the physical and moral health of the individual, with all that may facilitate cleanliness. The children looked to me resplendent with health. The children in England are legion. It is absolutely dreadful to think that women have given birth to all these small fry. They will never own it, but I am persuaded that here they must all have had two of them at a time. Along all the roads, in the ditches which edge the paths, one meets clusters of baby children. And the hen is never with her chickens. The brother of four years old watches over a smaller sister, and brings her back, safe and sound, to the house. By what miracle Mother Nature alone knows. This responsibility certainly helps in the formation of character. And it is scarcely credible, but I have never seen any ugly children in England. Many of them have the most adorable faces. If only this beauty remained the English race would certainly be privileged, but it falls away like a flower. Between the age of fourteen and eighteen a cruel change takes place with most of the young people. Their mouths alter in shape, their features lose their purity, the complexion its brilliancy. I attribute this entirely to the climate. An English doctor once said to me, "Dampness spoils everything." It is so true that people are even obliged to put their pictures under glass in this country. It is impossible to protect individuals in the same way and with the feeble ones, with those whose organism does not offer sufficient resistance, the damp changes the tissues, the bones, and, perhaps, other parts of the body besides. Sports are certainly prescribed by Nature in this climate. I have been taken to see golf, cricket, croquet and tennis, and all these games are admirably organised and played. For the

hundredth time I have regretted that around our provincial towns and our villages there are not these enclosed fields where young people can train themselves to physical effort. That will, however, all come in the appointed time.

I let myself be taken out, amused and entertained. It seems to me that it is all a delightful dream. I am always glad to enter for a time into the circle of other people's lives, and always glad to come out of it again. The longing for freedom, for solitude, comes to me again, more or less quickly, according to the surroundings. I shall not be in a great hurry, I am sure, to leave my present hosts and to bid farewell to this beautiful Simley, so warm with friendship and sympathy.

*Simley Hall.*

Yesterday evening I did something which the same morning, an hour or even a minute beforehand, I should have thought impossible. I told Sir William, a foreigner, and an Englishman of all men, the great trouble of my life. How it all came about I cannot understand. I have broken off my friendship with people for the sake of concealing it better. I have kept it a secret for fifteen years, and now, suddenly, without being asked a single question, without even wondering whether it were wise or foolish, the secret left my lips, and in the most natural way in the world. I experienced a strange pleasure in feeling my old self living again, after believing that I was dead and buried; I felt pleasure, too, in pronouncing certain names, in seeing certain images take form again. As I continued my story the picture of the past unfurled itself under my gaze, the work accomplished in my soul appeared to me in luminous flashes. By whom was I urged to speak? By that irresistible force, no doubt, which we might call the

Being of Beings. It sometimes puts into our mouths words which we hear distinctly, which we should like to take back, and which will have unforeseen consequences. This phenomenon of duality occurs at every instant. I recognise it at once, now, but I experience it nevertheless.

Yesterday evening the night was as serene as could be desired. The stars seemed as numberless as the grains of sand on our beaches. Consequently, just after ten o'clock, my host and I, followed by the dog Freddy, set off for the observatory. Sir William affirms that the animal is interested in his work, and that it often lifts its head towards the sky, as though endeavouring to discover what its master is looking for. I quite think that a fox terrier is capable of that.

The Simley observatory is a rotunda, flanked by two lower pavilions, one of which is a study and the other a small sitting-room, each opening on to the park with French windows. In the study the long table strewn with sheets of paper black with figures, the sidereal clock, the library of astronomical books, the instruments used for physics, the celestial maps, all reveal laborious hours. The little sitting-room with its divan, covered with Oriental stuff, its large arm-chairs, seems to be prepared for rest and meditation. As soon as we had arrived, Sir William, impatient to show me his planets and stars, put his foot in the loop of a rope, and to my great terror made the roof turn round, climbed on to the platform, adjusted the telescope and said simply, "There it is!" Hitherto my Observatory had been either the Place Vendôme or the Place de la Concorde, with their astronomers and optical instruments as poor as each other. I felt startled by the sight now presented to my view. I had the sensation of immensity, of infinite number, of perfect harmony, and at the same

time of a silence and a peace that were unearthly. The Twins fascinated me and in looking at them a strange joy came to me.

"What an adorable creation these sister-stars!" I exclaimed.

"Unique!" my host replied. "They appear to be quite near each other and they are separated by an enormous distance."

"That does not matter, for they must be in constant communion, as they have the same light, and do you know I have seen that same blue light, so warm and soft, at the bottom of a commutator. Are not the Twins centres of electricity?"

"Perhaps."

I looked for a long time at the dazzling heavens, and all at once, for the first time, the consciousness came to me that we were part of them.

"But our earth is up there!" I exclaimed, stupefied.

"Certainly," replied Sir William.

"And it goes along in company with all these stars! It mingles its little light with theirs, and by means of my own feeble organs I can see beyond our planet and enter into contact with the rest of the Universe! It is wonderful!"

With this exclamation I came down from the platform, literally dazed by my own grandeur.

Sir William, very much amused at my *naïveté*, took me into his little sitting-room. I sank down into an arm-chair in front of the open window. He sat down facing me and Freddy at once sprang on to his knees and nestled down there.

"The companion of my meditations," he said, stroking the animal. "When I am thinking I have got into the habit of twisting his ears. While under the impression of anything painful or when thinking over

a tiresome question, it sometimes happens that I pinch them cruelly. He protests by a cry, but never owes me a grudge. Freddy, too, is up there, you know."

"Don't make fun," I said gravely. "Our childish expressions here below, such, for instance, as the setting and rising of the sun deceive us so much. Providence has, perhaps, brought me here to put my vision right, to give me more exact notions. What good they will be I do not know, but I am sure that they will not be wasted."

"I do not know anyone who has the consciousness of immortality and growth as you have; you consider yourself the instrument of Providence."

"It is in that that my pride and my hope rest. From the moment that I am part of the integral work of God I cannot perish."

"You are logical — astonishingly so, for a woman."

"Thank you. Twenty times a day man proclaims his free will and still more often when he is stopped by things over which he has no power he storms against destiny. Have you noticed that he always attributes his good fortune to his own wits and his ill fortune to fatality?"

"Yes, that is so."

"Well, I attribute everything to Providence. I have been led to acknowledge that Providence alone, here below, has the guidance."

"Belief in one's self. What a force, though, that is!"

"But I believe in myself because I believe in God — and I believe in God because I believe in myself."

A long sigh escaped from the breast of my host.

"I would give a great deal to have your faith," he said. "It would rid me of a certain remorse which weighs terribly on my life. My eldest son was very

much in love with a girl whom I thought below him, unworthy of him. I refused my consent to his marriage, and he went to India, and was killed in an ambush very soon after he arrived. Was it I who sent him out to his death? Was it God, even?"

"God, do not doubt that. You could not see what awaited him. His premature end has, perhaps, been a great mercy."

"What has given you such absolute faith?"

"My own life."

"Your life?"

It was only at this moment that I realised I was a stranger to my host. I could not help the colour coming into my face.

"It is true, you do not know anything about me, and you invited me to Simley Hall and have admitted me into the intimacy of your family."

"I know a lady when I see one," answered Sir William, smiling.

I bowed my thanks and then continued:

"I am surprised that you did not feel distrust when you saw me living in hotels in my own country."

"Not in the least; but, now that I know you better, your uprootal makes me feel sorry. Yesterday it seemed to me that you were looking regretfully at my little cottages. Am I mistaken?"

"No, there are times when I have a longing for a home, but it is only rarely. For a French woman to be uprooted there must have been a terrific shock. I experienced this, and it had been prepared for me from a long way off. Would you believe that, at the age of fourteen, I saw in a dream M. de Myères, whom I was to marry eleven years later."

"Is it possible?"

"It was so. One night I dreamt that I was in a

little bare, dark church, lighted by a side-door which opened on to the country. In this doorway, with a background of verdure, I suddenly saw the outline of a tall man, whose features I could not distinguish. He came slowly from the doorway, advanced straight towards me, took my hand and put a ring on my finger. The ring was too large, and it fell from my hand and rolled along the flags slowly, very slowly indeed, with a metallic sound. In my efforts to get it again I woke up, my forehead bathed in the perspiration of nightmare. I told this strange dream to my mother, and she appeared to be painfully affected by it. As to me I could never forget it. It left in my childish mind an anguish mingled with joy. Time only made the impression more vivid. The man's outline instead of fading away, became more distinct, more vivid. Sometimes, in my girlish fancies, I saw this figure coming towards me, and it made me feel a delicious commotion. We have no idea yet of the complexity of the human atom," I added, reflectively.

"Of the feminine atom especially," said Sir William with a smile.

"During the years which followed, this dream occupied my imagination. I gave various faces to the man, each one more handsome than the last one. I attributed to my phantom all the gifts and all good qualities. My coming out was delayed by the death of my grandparents. I was twenty years old before going to my first ball. Oh, that first ball! It was at the house of a lady in our neighbourhood. Expense had not been spared for my dress, and I wore one of those famous girls' dresses which first made the reputation of our great dress-maker, Doucet. It was of white tarlatan, with ruches, and trimmed with wild flowers. I can see it now, but I cannot see myself at all. Our own face

is unknown to us. The reflection in the glass is not sufficient for making an impression on our brain-cells, it appears."

"That is an observation I had never made," confessed my host.

"Is it not curious," I continued, "to think that the brain goes on keeping indelibly the colour of some fur-below, the style of a garment, whilst a crowd of other souvenirs disappears? These little things probably form part of a chain. Anyhow, that particular evening I was strangely happy in my pretty dress from Paris and in the joy of my first social success. I was talking gaily to my host, quite unconscious of what was about to happen, when my eyes fell on a tall, dark man, with a tawny moustache, who was coming towards us. The words stopped on my lips, my heart beat more quickly and I had the distinct sensation that this man was the personage of my dream, in flesh and blood. However that may be, his presence might well affect me, as he was my destiny, 'the master of the moment,' my future husband. Oh, don't you see that life is such a fascinating combination, that if we were allowed to know it still better we should give up eating and drinking?"

"That would be serious," remarked Sir William, in a mocking tone.

"The stranger, who was one of the guests of the *château*, came up to M. de B—— who introduced him. 'Monsieur de Myères, Mademoiselle Latour.' These two names, thus associated together, echoed within me as though they had been pronounced in a very loud voice. I can hear them still. M. de Myères was a man of good family. He was then thirty-five years of age, and had the voice and face of a charmer of women. You know that mellow voice, the vibrations of which penetrate to the very depths of one's being.

He had an intelligent face, bold, tender eyes, and a sensual mouth. That was the type of man. We began to talk at once. He asked me for a waltz, and, without troubling about the fact that I had promised my mother only to dance polkas and quadrilles, I gave it to him. He guided me along through the room, and I do not know whether it was the intoxication of the movement, regulated by the music, or the effect of his magnetism, but for a few moments I lost all notion of time, place and my own personality. When he took me back to my place I fancied that I had just tasted the bliss of the elect. M. de Myères was married, but separated from his wife through serious incompatibility of character. He owned the Château of Chavigny in the department of Cher, and spent some months of the year there. The rest of the time he lived in Paris. After this first meeting, many circumstances, independent of our own will, threw us together. For a young girl of my generation a married man did not exist. I merely said to myself that I would never marry a man unless he were like M. de Myères. Every time anyone was proposed to me, his figure — that of the man of my dream, for they were one now — rose up in my mind and I refused to hear of anyone else. One evening, at Trouville, where he was spending the season, as we were, I was strolling along the beach with a distant cousin, a friend of my childhood. For the tenth time this cousin was pleading his cause, and so ardently that I nearly allowed myself to be touched by it. It was a little before the dinner hour, the horizon was covered with clouds and the sea looked gloomy. Out of this dark background I saw M. de Myères come forth. He was leaving the Casino and walking slowly, his head bent down. The sight of him aroused in me a curious pity, and to the words of my companion I replied, in

quite a loud voice, 'No, no!' I spoke with such vehemence that the poor fellow thought I had a horror of him. To sum up, the following year M. de Myères was free and, as soon as etiquette allowed, he asked for my hand. He was wealthy, his family was one of the oldest and most respected of Berry, he himself was known as a man of honour. It was what was called a good match. My mother, however, only gave her consent regretfully. She knew that M. de Myères was rather unsteady, and that he gambled. She would have liked to keep from me sorrows such as she had known, but she could not. I turned a deaf ear to her objections and even to her prayers."

I stopped abruptly, and a painful blush mounted to my cheeks. It was so sorrowful, so humiliating all that remained to be told.

"And you were not happy, of course?" said my host, with a look full of sympathy. This question provoked a nervous laugh from me.

"Not happy," I repeated with irony. "I was, though, extremely so, on the contrary, happy as few women are, but my happiness was false. M. de Myères had the qualities which fascinated me the most, which still fascinate me. He was an aristocrat, with perfect manners, brilliant in society, exquisite in everyday life. He had the mentality of a writer, the temperament of a gambler, an irresistible mixture of forces and weaknesses. He had only one fault, he loved gambling. I can see again in his eyes the look which betrays that kind of folly and announces the return of the attack. These fits were rare with him, but like my mother, I soon learnt the effects of loss and gain. I went through the long nights of waiting and of anguish. His return though, the sound of his footstep, of his voice, made me forget instantaneously. I have always believed that

he possessed some special magnetism, for his presence had such power. Then, too, he loved me, and he told me so over and over again, and in the most charming words. I felt a foolish pride when I said to myself that I had been able to retain the heart and passion of this man who was reputed to be so changeable in love affairs. After fourteen years of marriage my first real grief was the change in his health. Rheumatism, from which he suffered from time to time, attacked the heart. He complained of feeling a coldness there which nothing could alleviate; fits of suffocation followed, and each crisis meant that his life was in danger. The last attack continued a week, during which time I never took a minute's rest. Finally he was better, and at last one evening the doctor said that all danger was over. In spite of that I would not leave him. Towards ten o'clock he was resting peacefully, and I laid my head on his pillow, put my hand on his and, whilst listening with delicious joy to his regular breathing, fell asleep soundly myself. In the morning I was aroused by a sensation of strange, intense cold, that of death. It had really come 'like a thief in the night,' and was there, rigid, implacable and mysterious."

Freddy uttered a cry. Under the influence of the emotion caused by my story, his master had pinched his ear nervously.

"Leave Freddy's ears alone," I said, with surprising calmness, "or just now you will run the risk of pulling them off. After all I have told you," I continued, "you will understand how perfectly united we were. I have always imagined that our union dated much further back than my dream. The separation was terrible. Whilst I was preparing my husband for the grave, and moving his lifeless limbs, I felt for the first time, the voluptuousness of excessive suffering. There was a cer-

tain pleasure in feeling the warm tears flow. Death had smoothed away the lines of care from my husband's forehead, and given back to his face a serenity and a youthfulness that I had never seen there. He appeared to me wonderfully handsome. From a kind of jealousy I did not want to have anyone near him. His bedroom was next to our small drawing-room and I kept the door open whilst doing all that was necessary. All my strength of character came to my aid and helped me to be perfectly clear-minded. Towards five o'clock the footman brought me three letters for M. de Myères, addressed to him at his club. The groom had just come with them. I though I recognized the hand-writing of the Baroness d'Hauterive, a first cousin of mine, and a great friend of my childhood. She lived at the Château of Rocheilles, near Périgueux. I opened this letter mechanically, and read it once and then a second time. Ah, I had difficulty in understanding it. Do you know what it told me? Just simply that this first cousin, this friend of my childhood, was my husband's mistress."

Sir William uttered an exclamation.

"Yes, she told him of her arrival at the Hotel V—— accompanied by little Guy, his god-child, who in reality, it appeared, was his son. This revelation roused a sort of whirlwind in my brain. I rushed towards M. de Myères, in a transport of madness, and I shook his dead body exclaiming, 'You have deceived me, then; you have deceived me!' Letting the rigid corpse fall down again I stepped back horrified at my own sacrilege. For a few seconds I gazed at my husband with that curiosity which is always felt for criminals. He had betrayed me; he belonged to another! A wave of anger went through all my being, and I made a movement forward, feeling a desire to kill this dead man! The

desire to kill a dead man, you cannot imagine what that is like," I added, lowering my voice. "It is as though the stain of it has remained ever since on my soul. Before leaving M. de Myères I bent down again over him quite close and I said to him between my clenched teeth, 'I will never, never forgive you, do you understand?' No, he did not understand; he was beyond my reach, beyond my vengeance — above and beyond it. Was he so far away, though? As I rose again, I saw, floating over his lips, a life-like smile in which there was deep tenderness and pity, that pity which one has for children. There was something extraordinary in that smile, the meaning of which I have not yet discovered. It acted on me like Divine magnetism. It tamed me calmed me. I felt it follow me as I went away. On the threshold of the door I turned round to cry out again to my husband, 'I will never forgive'— and it hushed my words, that mysterious smile. During all these years it has been my drop of dew."

"What a cruel trial!" said my host, with an accent of deep compassion.

"Yes, less painful, though, than you imagine. I endeavour now to be just to Providence. It handles in an admirable way the forces which we are. Great sorrows produce a kind of numbness. After this frightful scene I went to my own room, my legs powerless from emotion, my limbs shaking with nervous trembling, but I did not suffer. I sat down to my desk, and, finding in my clenched hand the tell-tale letter, I unfolded it, spread it out, passed my fingers over it in order to smooth out the creases, as though it were some precious document. At that moment, the door opened and Madame d'Hauterive, in person, burst into my room. It was a curious thing, but the sight of her did not rouse my anger. It was, no doubt, exhausted.

"'Oh, Antone, Antone,' she said, stretching out her hands to me, 'I have just heard ———

"'That M. de Myères is dead,' I interrupted tranquilly. 'Yes, he died this morning, that is why he was not able to go to the Hôtel V——.'

"Madame d'Hauterive stepped back, seized with wild terror. Her eyes fell upon her own letter, and she threw herself on her knees, took my hand in hers and begged for my forgiveness. She talked for a long time, trying, I suppose, to justify herself. I did not listen. I looked at her with curiosity. I could see her again as a child, as a girl, as a young wife, deliciously pure. And she had become the mistress of my husband — she, who was almost my sister. My dear little Colette of olden days. It all seemed to me fantastic. My silence made her think that she had touched me, and she begged me to let her see M. de Myères. How dared she? The audacious request made me start, but did not provoke any burst of anger. With a calmness which astonishes me even now, I told her that if I could have sent him to the Hotel V—— I would willingly have done so, but that under my roof she would not see him. I forbade her to be present at the funeral, threatening her that if she should take it into her head to be there, I should disclose all to her husband, and I then ordered her to go away. She rose, and I saw her stagger to the door, search for the handle as though she were blind, and then disappear. We have never met each other since then. After her departure I burnt her letter, lest I should yield to the temptation of sending it to Baron d'Hauterive."

"I am glad you did that," said my host.

"I am, too," I answered. "I am glad to have done it, as it was more prudent," I added, smiling.

"All this brought on brain fever, and for three days

I struggled in wild delirium. Would you believe that when M. de Myères left the house I knew it by instinct. I sat up suddenly in bed, my senses made singularly keener, and I listened. In the corridor, outside of my bedroom, I heard muffled sounds, low voices, then the creaking of the floor, the effort of the bearers — I had the sensation of the heaviness of the body. These good people tried to deaden the sound of their footsteps. The precaution made me smile, for it seemed to me so unnecessary. It was not the man of my dream, of my life that they were taking away, it was Colette d'Hauterive's lover, and I was glad of it — yes, glad! It is not really death which separates individuals most. To-day when I can philosophise over human sentiments, I am astonished at the strength of jealousy and the effects of infidelity. This opportune fever spared me the difficulty of pretending to be ill or so prostrated with grief as to be unable to accompany my husband to his last resting-place in the R— cemetery. My sister-in-law and my brother-in-law went in my stead. God, whom I had immediately accused of cruelty, had, on the contrary, shown me infinite compassion. For the last two years M. de Myères' speculations on the Stock Exchange had been disastrous. It meant ruin in the near future. The Château of Chavigny was sold. The financial situation was then settled honourably, and nothing remained for me but my private fortune. We had been living in one of the prettiest flats I have ever known. It was in a corner house of the Place François I, and was very sunny. With wicked joy I at once began to destroy this elegant, comfortable and hospitable nest, in which I had had fifteen years of false happiness. I sent everything to the auction-room, furniture, pictures, relics, souvenirs. I should have liked to burn them in a heap. What a fine grief fire it would have been! I made my will afresh,

with the sole object of expressing my formal wish to be cremated. The idea of being buried side by side with M. de Myères was intolerable to me. I felt that my body would turn all the time in a tomb shared with him. I was in a wild hurry to be alone and free, to escape from my relatives, friends and acquaintances, to cut away my roots. I did it brutally, and there were so many — oh so many! In spite of my activity it took a certain time. The day arrived, finally, when I closed for ever behind me the door of home and found myself "on the branch." I went to stay at the Hôtel de Castiglione. The owner of it was an Italian, kind and sympathetic, and he treated me with a consideration which made me like his house. I at once began my preparation for a journey to Cairo, as I had resolved to commence my pilgrimages with Egypt. And do you know what I did before leaving Paris?"

"No."

"Well, at night-fall, like a criminal, I went and threw my wedding ring into the Seine."

"Oh!" exclaimed Sir William, with a horrified expression.

"Yes, it was abominable I know, and I feel remorseful about it. When I cross the Concorde bridge I always have a painful sensation, and in spite of myself my eyes are attracted towards the spot where the sacred or accursed symbol was swallowed up. Do you remember in my dream the stranger's ring slipped from my finger and rolled along the flags of the little Church? M. de Myéres' ring was not to stay with me. Look" I added, showing my ringless finger.

"Curious — very curious," murmured my host.

"Is it not? And now that I have told you this terrible story, in order to be just to the gods I must show you what its effect has been on me. You will see then, certainly, that it was intended, written in the book of

fate, necessary. My father's family for generations past had been unbelievers and sceptical. My mother's family, on the contrary had always had the most ardent and absolute faith."

"Those different elements must have caused great conflict in you."

"No, for I had inherited solely the paternal mentality."

"Ah, that was more simple."

"Yes; and do you know what was my first question? I wanted to know why God had created wolves and nettles. The wolves which devour the young lambs and the nettles which stung my bare legs seemed to me incompatible with that Divine goodness about which I was always being told."

"It was not easy to answer your question."

"Those I asked got out of it by saying they had been created in order to make children prudent and wise. That did not satisfy me at all and the day when I realised what human misery was, I began to say, 'God has not a kind heart!' I frequently repeated the childish phrase, and nothing could make me change this sentiment. When I learnt that he made orphans, I refused to pray to him. My father used to say, laughing, 'Antone has quarrelled with God.'"

"You must have been a pleasant child to bring up," observed Sir William, smiling.

"A grievous child for a mother like mine," I confessed, not without regret. "Poor Mother! She shrank from the task of preparing me for confirmation and placed me at the Convent of the Sacred Heart, in the hope that the atmosphere there would develop religious feeling in my soul. I was there two whole years, and I should be sorry not to have lived those years. It was not long before the atmosphere of the convent began to

act upon me. I ceased reasoning and arguing. My intellectual and physical activity relaxed. I was seized with a sort of delicious languor. Sacred music, religious ceremonies, which had hitherto left me indifferent, touched me deeply. I was no longer bored by the mass and vespers. The liturgy seemed to me magnificent and I delighted in repeating it. The words sounded grand to my ear. Sometimes I slipped away from the noisy recreation and stole into the quiet church. I stayed there without praying, without thinking even, my eyes fixed on the gilded door of the tabernacle, as though hypnotised by a real presence, and I had the sensation that waves passed and repassed over me. I am glad to have known that state of mind, it has helped me to understand the irresistible vocations and sublime renunciations of others. Catholicism alone puts into action the forces which allow one to reach the Beyond. My first communion brought this crisis of religious fervour to a paroxysm. It was only a crisis as you can imagine. When once I left the Convent my mind became troubled again, ever seeking the truth, unbelieving. I took the dogma, point by point, and discussed it constantly with my mother. She clung to the faith which was her only consolation, and I tried to take it from her. May she forgive me, for I did not know what I was doing. Human suffering, the sufferings of animals, especially, the apparent injustice of things, the cruelties of the laws of Nature, the sight of the cat torturing the mouse, all this was revolting to me. I did not believe in the efficacy of prayer, I did not see any hope of mercy anywhere. Beside all this, although I had not read *Candide* my dreams were of a God whom I could simply adore and thank, like the one of the beautiful country of Eldorado. Unconsciously I have always been looking for Him and I have now found Him. The promise of the Gospel has been verified for me."

"Tell me about that," said Sir William, with an expression of keen interest.

"By leaving Paris I fancied I should more easily forget M. de Myères. You can imagine how possible that was! During our fifteen years of communion he had left too much of his soul in me for the impress of it to be effaced at will. I travelled in Egypt, Italy, Germany, England, Holland and Switzerland. I covered miles and miles by railroad, boat and carriage. I heaped up impressions upon impressions, images upon images, without succeeding in forgetting him. Often when looking at some celebrated site, when enjoying some fine view of Nature, some work of art, three little words would come forth from one of the cells of my brain, three adverbs — Where? When? How? and my vision was at once troubled, and all pleasure destroyed. Where had he loved Colette d'Hauterive? When had he betrayed me? How had she come to give herself to him? These were the three questions that came to my lips, on the Nile even, in the unique splendour of its sunsets, in Italy, in the silence of its Coliseum, in Switzerland, on the Alpine heights. Where, when and how? These questions formed a triangle in my mind. I knew too much and too little. I kept going back to the past to find some indication. Little Guy was ten years old and he was the son of M. de Myères. Before and after that time I could find nothing suspicious, unless it were a marked change in my cousin's character, in her manner with me, a change that I had attributed to all kinds of causes except the right one. Then, too, she knew how to obtain forgiveness for so many things. She was a brilliant, impulsive woman, instinctively coquettish, but good at heart. She had a charm of manner and conversation of which one never wearied. We had surnamed her 'the linnet,' and we spoiled her as much as

we could. Going through her childhood and youth in my memory, I could not find one single act of disloyalty. Her husband adored her and she seemed to have great affection for him. They were very happy and very united in their home. The year after the birth of Guy she had desired to leave Paris definitely and had stayed at 'Les Rocheilles,' where she had become a lady bountiful. Later on, Baron d'Hauterive and M. de Myères had a political quarrel which rather separated us, without actually breaking off a friendship as old as ours. During the last years of my husband's life he had always appeared to avoid rather than to seek the society of my cousin. Their good comradeship of former times had changed into a hostility about which I had foolishly grieved. The comedy had been well played, so well that I had never detected any sign of indifference on the part of my husband. My presence always brought an expression of pleasure to his face. Three weeks before his death, as he was going out of my room, he turned back on the threshold of the door and said, in a tender tone, 'Antone, I adore you!' And he was lying to me all the time! I do not know which poet it was who said: 'The worst grief is not to be able to mourn those whom we have lost.'"

"Byron," replied Sir William promptly. "It was his mother that he could not regret."

"He was the only man I had ever loved. I envied the people who had dead friends whom they could mourn. One day at Rome, in the cemetery, I saw a widow sobbing at the tomb of her husband. I stooped down towards her and said in a very low voice, 'How fortunate you are!' She must have thought that these were the words of a mad person. Rome — I have not suffered anywhere, I think, as much as there. I often wondered why it was. M. de Myères and I had

stayed there for a few weeks during the winter which preceded his death. I was imprudent enough to return eighteen months after, and I found him there, just as though he had gone, too. I stayed at the Hôtel Quirinal, and had a drawing-room and bedroom with a sunny aspect, looking over a flower-garden. The society there was pleasant, and yet I was very sad, the hateful memory pursued me pitilessly. As soon as I was out in the street I found myself engulfed in a strange atmosphere. Certain spots were particularly trying; the banks of the Tiber outside the Nomentana Gate, the Villa Medicis, the neighbourhood of the Maxence Circus. There, more than anywhere else, I felt the presence of M. de Myères. His affectionate words would come back to me, and every one of them caused me intense grief. I was like a woman whose wreath of roses had been changed by some evil spell into a crown of thorns. And then, too, whatever I did, my uprootal was very painful to me. Love, friendship, social relations, wealth, everything had been taken from me at the same time. This brutal dismantling caused me a sensation of nakedness and humiliation. The most curious part was that I worked hard for that end myself. Announcements of marriages and deaths, invitations, letters from friends, I threw into the waste-paper basket, and yet it took me five years to die socially. When I received nothing more from anyone, I tried to persuade myself that I was satisfied, but I was not, by any means. I was some time, too, getting used to my room at the hotel. After the Château of Chavigny and my Paris flat in the Place François I, the 'traveller's house' as the Hindoos call hotels, seemed to me terribly cold and commonplace. I was always knocking myself, mentally and physically, against the walls, which were too near together. Oh, I can tell you that I gnawed my bit!"

"Did not your cousin ever make any attempt to see you again?" asked Sir William.

"Yes, she wrote to me more than ten times — I burnt all her letters without reading them."

"That was bad. There were perhaps extenuating circumstances for her sin."

"They could not have prevented little Guy from being the son of M. de Myères. I did not want to hear them, for I did not want to hate less. I was wrong, I know, and I certainly increased my grief myself as though for the very pleasure of it. All that, you see, had no other object than to help me to come out of myself, and I came out, for I can assure you that it was neither good nor beautiful within my soul. My reading had been light and frivolous rather than anything else, but I had had the foundation of a good education, and this enabled me to enjoy and understand serious things. I grew passionately fond of history and followed with growing interest the work of science. I could only follow at a distance, and at a great distance, but still I was near enough to be conscious of the present evolution. I very quickly understood that it was God who made history, and not man. The discovery of the infinitely small things and that of electricity, which is so infinitely great, gave me the conviction that we could only be simple factors in the universe. For weeks I amused myself with counting, among my everyday acts those which seemed to depend on my own will. Very often there was not a single one. I would then count those over which I had no power, and these were always the most numerous. Try this little exercise, it will teach you more than all the books of philosophy."

"I will try it," answered my companion gravely.

"Until then I had only looked at the surface of life. I now began to study its texture and what there was un-

derneath it. I strove to follow a word along its path, to search for the threads, of which a marriage or a birth is composed. I was struck with the mathematical clearness of coincidences. I noticed that the orders from the Invisible come to us sometimes direct, sometimes through a number of our fellow-creatures. This transmission of the Divine will is extraordinarily interesting. For instance, how did the idea come to you to invite me to Simley?"

Sir William reflected for a few seconds.

"I do not know," he replied. "It came to me in a vague way after our first conversations, and then, one evening, as we were strolling along under the verandah I thought that it would interest you to see the sky nearer with a good telescope."

"Well, in my opinion, you simply obeyed the suggestion of Providence. That does not lessen my gratitude in the least. Oh, Providence recompenses me from time to time."

"On that score I, too, have been recompensed," said my host pleasantly.

"We both have," I added, smiling. "You see I have trained myself to say: 'God wishes it, God wills it,' instead of 'I wish it, I wanted it.' Ah, that was not easy. But what glorious pride I now have in feeling that I am working with Him, that from morning to night I go along transmitting His orders, that I am necessary to Him. I had no idea of my own powers of radiation. Just think of it, not a word useless!"

Sir William began to laugh.

"That's it, now we have woman justified! My compliments, Madame de Myères."

"Make fun if you like, but words and gestures will have their effect for a long time. Long after our death they will continue our action in this world. The

day when I realised these things I had the same surprise as just now on discovering that I was up there, and I exclaimed, 'But I am already in eternal life — we all are.'"

My host started.

"What an idea!" he exclaimed.

"And do you know what I imagined?"

"After that, I scarcely see what there was left for you to imagine," said Sir William in a caustic tone.

"That God did not create pain, that He could not even prevent it. It seems to me that it is the result of the forces put into motion. As to injustice it can only be apparent. It could not exist without destroying the laws of equilibrium."

"There, as a mathematician, I am of your opinion."

"From the point which I have now reached, through much difficulty and suffering, the treason of M. de Myères has lost its importance in a strange way. I know, too, of course, that man was created a polygamist."

Sir William's face lighted up with mischief and gaiety.

"Oh, indeed, you admit that. Come I shall begin to think you are serious."

"Perfectly serious. It is only with the object of limiting the creation of the westerner that Nature has given to him the counter-law of monogamy. The general law must be stronger than the partial one, and through this there are painful transgressions. When they occur, they too are necessary."

"Well, then, you will have to forgive your cousin and your husband."

"I forgave them a long time ago."

"And you have given up the idea of being cremated, I suppose," asked Sir William, to see how far I would go.

My heart thrilled suddenly, and I answered —

"I forgive, I excuse and understand, but I cannot forget. The thought of M. de Myères is always painful to me. I shall go back to my parents as divorced women do. I do not want to be cremated now."

"Ah, why not?"

"I happened to pay a visit to one of our writers some time before his death. He was very stout. With his elbows spread out, his wide head quite near to his paper, he gave one the idea of a ruminating, intellectual being, and was rather imposing. On reading that he had been cremated I instantly saw a handful of ashes on his writing-table. He has always remained that for me. Frankly speaking, the idea of such a transformation of the human being is rather painful. Underground one can think that there is still someone there. It is true that I shall not leave anyone to whom my little heap of dust could be painful."

"You do not know that."

"It is probable. And now," I asked, "does it not seem to you that I have merely lived my life, and not made it myself?"

"One would certainly say so."

"It was ordained like this. But all through my destiny I can distinguish a foreseeing Power. My shoulders had been prepared for the burden. A certain physical and moral robustness helped me to react. And the most marvellous thing still is this intellectual work which has been given to me, these brain cells which have been put into activity at the age of fifty, thus giving to my old age the divine joy of creation, a compensation, perhaps, for the sterility of my earlier life."

"I agree with you that it is absolutely extraordinary."

"Oh, I do not quarrel any more with God, I can assure you, we are even on the best of terms. Although

I do not live in Eldorado, far from it, indeed, I never ask Him for anything; I simply adore Him and thank Him." I then added, looking up at the sky as I rose, "This is one of the dramas of up there, for it is up there that all this has happened."

"A moment ago," said Sir William, "you said that not one of your words would be lost. I do not know anything about that; but I can assure you that not one of those of this evening will be lost for me."

"Well, that gives me great pleasure."

"I have never had the opportunity of talking seriously with a Frenchwoman. Providence, as you insist on that, has sent me one who is worth ten," remarked Sir William with a jesting smile.

"One who has lived for ten anyhow," I replied.

With these words we left the observatory and walked slowly and silently back through the Park. In face of grief an Englishman rarely finds words. He shows his sympathy by his attitude, his way of listening, an increase of respect and of attentions. In the very way in which my host opened the doors for me, there was a more marked shade of respect, and in the hearty handshake I felt an infinity of things that were very sweet and, I may as well confess it, very agreeable to me.

I was not only able to tell this painful episode of my life then, but to repeat it here. There is truly no more hatred and no more anger in my heart; only a sense of humiliation remains. Little Guy was destined to be born, to bring certain forces into life. I know that. He was destined to be born, but of another woman. Why was that? This idea still brings a blush to my face, although I am an old woman. It wounds me to the very depths of my being. I would never have owned that to an Englishman. Would he even have understood it? This past which has so unexpectedly

been stirred up again still affects me. Is it a sign that all is not yet finished? My cousin and the son of M. de Myères are still in this world. The elements for an epilogue are there certainly. Jean Noël would not resist the pleasure of writing it, but may Providence not be tempted to make me live it!

*Simley Hall.*

In every English house there is the nursery, just as with the bees there is the place where the young ones are reared. The nursery may be more or less large, more or less comfortable, but it exists; it is one of the characteristics even of the nation. When I pay a visit to a family where there are young children I try to get into the good graces of the rearer in order to have access there. The Simley nurseries are delightful. Several generations have succeeded each other in them, and they have been modernised by degrees. Mrs. Loftus and her two brothers were brought up in them. Her three children, Frank, seven years old, Lily, six, and William, two, inhabit them at present. They are situated in the corner of the right wing, and are composed of several rooms, a bath room, and a tiny kitchen with tiled walls adjoining, where the various milk foods and dainty dishes are prepared. One of the rooms is occupied by the head nurse, and the other by the brother and sister. A pretty screen separates their two beds, and in this human nest there is the brightest freshness and cleanliness imaginable. The papers are light and are framed with old mouldings. Everything in the room is made of simple things, muslin, cretonne and white wood. There is a portrait of the grandmother, whose smile follows one everywhere; then there are photographs of the parents and of favourite animals. Beautiful lithographs add to the animation and gaiety. A picture of Christ,

with the words " Suffer little children to come unto Me " in Gothic letters at the foot, brings a ray of sentiment and of elevated thought into the room. The day nursery is my delight. It is a long room with beams, lighted by two wide windows and furnished with a massive table with rounded ends, an old piano, a red leather sofa, a cupboard with glass doors, chairs of all sizes and a small rocking chair. It is full of old, primitive things and simple toys. One feels that one is among real children, and that is delightful. The other day, seated in one of the visitors' armchairs, I looked around and began mentally to admire the instinct or the science of parents who place the newcomers under the suggestion of objects likely to supply their brains with the best germs. Those flowers that I saw on the mantelshelf, those pictures of animals fastened up here and there, give to the children the love of Nature. And those engravings, illustrating the discoveries of Robinson Crusoe, teach them the necessity of effort. The portraits of the King and Queen are destined to create loyalty in them. And that map of the British empire, surmounted by the Union Jack, awakens in their hearts love and pride of their country. There is a touching scene of a rescue at sea which communicates to them a desire for heroism which, later on, may result in some valiant deed. The remembrance of that scroll over the mantelshelf, on which the Gospel precept flames out in red letters: " Do unto others what ye would that they should do unto you." This will serve later on to check the tongue or the hand inclined to some injustice. Mrs. Loftus nursed her three children herself; the nurse has weaned them and brought them up with remarkable intelligence. Her firmness gives her a hard look, under which one divines a motherly and tender heart. Beside this, there is a certain poetic vein in her which must have come to her from

Ireland. She feels Nature and has an inexhaustible fund of tales, legends and pretty verses with which she regales the children in the winter, by the fire and during the long twilights. Her disposition, which softens the atmosphere around her, does not prevent her from maintaining strict discipline in the nursery. The other day, on entering, I noticed Master Frank seated in a melancholy way in the middle of the room, without any playthings, his hands resting on the arms of his chair.

"What is he doing there?" I asked at once.

"What is he doing, madame," repeated Sarah, astonished at my question. "He is learning to keep still. Ten minutes in the morning and ten minutes in the afternoon; that rests him and me too."

Learning to keep still! How evident it is that *we* were never taught that. I have had more than one opportunity of admiring the prompt obedience that this simple woman obtains from her little ones. Yesterday morning she was bathing Lily. The baby, still in his cot, was awaiting his turn, not without impatience, for he kept getting up every minute to see how far advanced the operation was. Sarah noticed it, and called out in an imperative tone —

"Lie down, sir."

At this command the child lay down on his back, with such a rapid, precise movement that it might have been taken for a drill. It was irresistibly droll.

"What a good general you would make, Sarah!" I said.

"Thank you, madame," she answered, with an expression of pleasure.

Frank and Lily, it appears, had been very much afraid of the French lady, whose arrival had been announced to them. Heaven knows what image of her had been formed in their brains. When I arrived they

held out their little hands to me with visible distrust. I was fortunate enough to find words which at once put them at ease. From the very next day they showed me their treasures in the way of toys and picture-books, introduced to me their fox terrier, Kim, the cat, Rose, two habitual guests of the nursery, Tit and Bit, their ponies, Dodo the baby's donkey. They are charming to look at, in their simple, convenient clothes, their bare legs and feet covered, according to the precepts of Kneipp, with leathern sandals, which are very much in vogue at present. Their features give promise of beauty. Lily has large blue eyes and hair the colour of ripe chestnuts. The shape of little Frank's head is remarkably good, and always excites my admiration. At times he presses his lips together with an expression which suddenly hardens his babyish expression, and which may be the sign of a strong will. Once or twice I have seen in him that repugnance to confess himself beaten which is a characteristic of his race. Once, when out walking, we came to one of those barriers called stiles.

"Do you think I could jump it?" he asked his mother.

"Yes," she replied, "but you would run the risk of hurting yourself, and badly enough to be obliged to send for the doctor."

The child looked as though he were measuring the height of the obstacle. The struggle going on in his mind made the blood come and go under his delicate skin.

"I think I will jump it," he declared at last.

"You are free to do as you like," said Mrs. Loftus.

He quickly took off his sandals, climbed up the three bars of the stile, balanced himself for an instant on the top, and then dropped down on the other side on his feet.

"I have not hurt myself," he cried, with an accent of triumph.

"So much the better, my love," replied his mother tranquilly.

We glanced at each other. She was glad that the young urchin had risked the jump, and so was I. I am always charmed to see the important place that flowers and animals have in the life of English children. Lily and Frank often come back from their walks with branches of green for decorating their nursery. They know the names of all the birds which frequent the lawn, and are interested about the nests. Sarah told me that in the spring she noticed that the cushions belonging to the chairs of the brother and sister had suddenly become singularly flat. It was all in vain that she shook them and put them out in the sunshine, for they were smaller every day. She finally suspected the under nurse of stuffing her own bed at the expense of these pillows, but one fine morning, through the open door, she saw Lily and her brother busy pulling, out of the inside slips, pinches of horsehair, which they were throwing through the window.

"What are you doing?" she exclaimed.

"We are giving the birds some horsehair for their nests," answered the little girl, with the most adorable serenity.

The nurse, quite disarmed, only told them that they must not give away things belonging to their parents without asking permission. It certainly was a pretty idea.

I often dress early for dinner so that I may be present when the children are put to bed. It is the sweetest little picture. All is done with a decency which delights me. Childhood is respected here, and not made unpoeti-

cal. The day before yesterday, Lily, in her night-dress, said to me in a reproachful tone —

"Madame de Myères, you don't notice how I fold my clothes."

I at once went up to the chair upon which she spreads her clothes every evening and complimented her. Her pretty face flushed with pleasure. One evening, whilst undressing, she asked me suddenly, stretching out her round, white arms —

"Do you like my arms?"

"Very much," I replied seriously.

"And my hair?" she asked, presenting to me the golden ends of her plait.

"Yes."

"And my foot?" she added.

"Yes, that too," and I squeezed the plump little foot she held out to me.

She went through everything — her eyes, nose, mouth, teeth, and finally I told her that I liked good little girls altogether, but I could not help smiling at the English expression "Do you like?" which really means "Do you think it pretty?"

The evening prayer always touches me very much. It consists of the following words, which the child, with clasped hands, repeats, keeping its eyes fixed on the nurse's lips: "Pray God bless my dear papa and mamma, my brother and sister, all my relations and friends, and make me a good child, for Jesus Christ's sake, Amen." The two elder children add the Lord's prayer and a very simple hymn. Sarah reads them a verse from the Old or New Testament and so the day finishes in the Simley Hall "nest."

When the children heard that the day of my departure was very near, it occurred to Frank and Lily to invite

me to tea in their nursery. I would not, upon any account, have refused this invitation written in big letters, so touching by the effort that it represented. At four o'clock precisely I arrived in their domain, and found there a charming girl who lives near. She is a great friend of theirs, and they had asked her to help them to entertain me. The dear children, what joy there was when they saw me appear! They had gathered the wild flowers which decorated the table, ordered from the cook hot cakes such as she makes for grown-up people, and superintended all the arrangements. They seemed very proud of their work, and my surprise and compliments brought a bright look of pleasure on to their sweet faces. Their friend, Miss Mills, poured tea, and Sarah passed the cups, whilst they did the honours of the dainties with a perfect self-forgetfulness. The picture of our table was droll and not at all commonplace. At one end of it an old woman, at the other end a young girl dressed in white serge, to the right a charming baby-child, a doll, a little girl of six years old; to the left a little fellow in sailor costume, and then the fox terrier Kim, and Rosy, the cat, both on tall chairs. Frank, feeling most hospitable, expressed his regret at not being able to make toast for me at the nursery fire as they do in winter. His sister asked me to come again at Christmas, which was the most beautiful time of the year. The remembrance of the last Christmas festivities still delights them. The little boy showed me the lion fastened on to the wall. It was the Christmas present of their *Illustrated Paper*. He told me all the lion's misdeeds. In his imagination the wild beast had devoured more than a thousand lambs, and when he was grown up it was his intention to go and kill it. Lily told me about the vaccination of her daughter Fanny. With an expression of maternal pride she told us that

her child had been very brave and had not cried. Whilst hearing all this a curious thing took place. I forgot reality and my age. I had a sensation of a fresh life, of light atmosphere; it seemed to me that I was commencing and this was delicious. The entrance of Sir William put an end to the illusion. He stopped an instant on the threshold of the door.

"Ah, Madame de Myères," he said, with a slight quivering of the nostrils from emotion, "this is what I call the essence of goodness."

"Don't say any more," I answered, smiling, "I am taking a bath of childhood. That could only happen here."

Frank and Lily hurried towards their grandfather, installed him in his arm-chair, and gave him some tea.

"What a number of things these children will know!" he said, with an accent of regret.

"Will they be happier?"

"Will they not be better armed? Does not progress consist in furnishing the elements for life?"

"Furnishing the elements for life!" I repeated. "Yes, that is the care of you Englishmen. We, on the other hand, without intending it, we furnish the elements for death. I do not think I am mistaken in saying that a great part of the physical and moral force of your country is acquired in the nursery."

"That is my opinion."

"In France we have no nursery."

"Why do you not have it? I have often wondered."

"Because we generally live in flats," I replied, "on shelves that are very uncomfortable and insufficient."

"But in the provinces you have beautiful roomy houses where you could install nurseries, studies, bathroom, a gymnasium, and everything that is necessary for the development of the individual."

"In the provinces, alas, the minds and the furniture are always under dust-covers. People deliberately close their ears in order not to hear scientific men, lest these should destroy ancient prejudices. They close their shutters so that the sun may not fade their curtains. In the provinces people respect their prejudices and curtains. The basis of our economy is avarice; the basis of our paternal and maternal love is egotism. We love our family, our children; we do not love the species. These are the real causes of the depopulation which alarms and humiliates us. If Providence wished it, these would disappear, and Providence will wish it some day, you may be sure."

"I sincerely hope so," said Sir William.

After thanking the children heartily, I left the nursery with my host, and we took a few turns in the park.

"If you had had ten children, Madame de Myères," he said, "you could not understand them better."

"I should understand them less," I replied. "A mother loves her children blindly, she does not know them. She cannot detach herself from them enough to study them. This study would even seem impious to her, I fancy. I will confess, not without shame, that I have never cared for children. I had, during one year only, a sort of hunger for motherhood. Five years ago the daughter of the proprietor of my hotel was expecting her baby, and the birth of a human creature which was about to take place near me suddenly interested me. The sight of the preparations, of the bassinette, the scales and the first clothes stirred my heart and aroused my curiosity. I had seen the end of life; it seemed to me that I ought to see the beginning. It was as though Providence prided itself on supplying me with an excellent specimen for my subject of study, as the newly-sent child was a miracle of beauty. Its

head was covered with golden brown hair, as curly as a lamb's fleece. She was introduced to me under a stream of electric light and, dazzled by it, she blinked her eyes. I put my finger into her hand, and she squeezed it as though from an instinctive need to cling to something. The contact of this warm, soft, animated flesh was so delicious that the sensation of it has remained with me. Ever since that moment, for the last five years, I have watched the development of the child's body and intelligence. I was not long in discovering that children are the most unknown and the most misunderstood of all beings."

"It is because each one has a different character and it is impossible to judge one by another," objected Sir William.

"Yes, but the inner stimulus which determines its act is the same. Have you not noticed that the baby of five or six months always throws away the plaything that is given to it, and as far as possible?"

"That is so."

"And that directly afterwards it moves forward as though to fetch it."

"Yes, exactly."

"That is just simply the means Nature has found for putting into action its muscles of locomotion. To run after something — that is the primordial, eternal instinct. When the child wants to obey this instinct, the mother or nurse, who is holding it keeps it back by force, and so provokes its anger. I am convinced that what we call naughtiness is only play. The little one likes to tease the big one, the big one does not understand, punishes and often whips the child. The newcomer, on arrival here, must touch objects, an infinite number of objects, in order to come into contact with life. We hinder this, rightly or wrongly. The child

is a born explorer, and we hold him in as much as possible. The cries that he utters are necessary for enlarging his chest, for exercising his lungs, and we correct him in order to make him be quiet. And this sort of thing continues through ignorance. We thwart the instinct which is really a great force, instead of guiding it with wisdom. I wonder why naturalists do not study the child as they do ants and bees."

"Darwin undertook that study."

"Yes, in order to try to find proofs of our filiation with the animals. I should like it to be done without any preconceived idea. Men of science ought to be the ones to enlighten a mother, to guide the education. But we are only children ourselves. In the meantime the study that I made of little Loulou revealed many things to me and aided Jean Noël considerably. I saw the awakening of her sensitiveness, various glimmerings soon over, which were reproduced at rather long intervals, and then more and more frequently. I caught strange reflections in her eyes, gleams of sensuality, of a soul older than the body. I watched her attempts to stand up. Oh, how touching it is, that effort of the human creature. The day when, after refusing my help, she succeeded, her face beamed and she looked round in quest of applause. It was as though she had a vague consciousness of having mounted one step of the ladder of life. One day, gentle as she is, she threw the plaything she was holding at the head of her nurse, without any provocation. I shall never forget the pathetic terror of her expression when she stammered out, 'I couldn't help it.' The reflex action which I had witnessed staggered me. How many times do we do what we cannot help. The phenomenon of suggestion has always excited my admiration more than any other. After the bedtime play I was often present during the

prayers. I was amazed to see the nurse, a humble Breton woman with her hieratic head-dress, standing up near the cot, her hand on the child's chest, transmitting to her, unconsciously, the antique formulas, and the child, its eyes fixed on her lips, repeating, without understanding them, words which came to her across nineteen centuries: 'Jesus, the fruit of your entrails, is blessed.' You cannot imagine anything like the contrast of such words from those childish lips."

My host smiled.

"No, and I can imagine that a mother would not see those things just as Jean Noël did."

"It was not my mind alone that was interested. I had grown fond of this child I was studying. The hour that I was with her was the happiest of my day. I began to love her dolls. I enjoyed handling her toys. She could not pronounce my name, and so she called me 'Mi.' This note, uttered in her exquisite voice, gave me great joy. Little Loulou has gone out of the circle of my life, but she has left behind her a luminous track. She put me into communion with the soul of a child. That was probably her mission, for I must see and hear children now. Yours have added very much to the pleasure of my visit to Simley Hall."

"And I am not sure they will not forget the French lady. You have made them *francophile* for ever. That was your secret object, wasn't it?" added my companion in a bantering way, though visibly touched.

"Yes. Is not that a good sort of patriotism?"

"The very best there is, and the most agreeable," replied Sir William smiling.

*Simley Hall.*

The day after to-morrow I am leaving this hospitable dwelling where I have been at rest a whole month. For

a few weeks I shall certainly feel the coldness of the hotel and shall regret the home life that I have been sharing. I pay, with a good grace, for the joys that are accorded me. It was necessary that I should come for a time among these strangers. . . . What was I to do? What elements have I brought to them? A little of my Latin soul, some of my French ideas, no doubt. Sir William declares that I have done him a great deal of good. And he on his side, what a number of things he has taught me during our long conversations. I have always desired and appreciated the society of men of culture. My destiny has been to live among worldly people, among frivolous men and women, and a certain side of my nature has adapted itself very well to this, I must own. Most savants, too, only possess knowledge of special subjects and have no idea of things as a whole. With my host I have had the pleasure of being able to look at life and to discuss it. He has more science and I more intuition. Intuition is the science of the ignorant. By means of these two factors we have arrived at conclusions, and have mutually enlarged our ideas. Was that the object of our meeting? This question keeps coming to my lips and to my pen. Lady Randolph has contributed greatly to the pleasure of my stay at Simley Hall. What a contrast this woman is — so respectful of the orders and wishes of her husband, and such an inflexible guardian of tradition and customs — to the emancipated American women among whom I live. I like to watch her in the evening, at the head of the table, in her low-necked silk dress trimmed with old lace, and her old jewellery. She carves the enormous pieces of roast beef placed before her with an elegance such as I have never before seen. And it is a pretty sight, the mistress of the house dispensing to her family and guests the elements of life. When, during dinner, the modern

spirit makes itself too evident, when ideas which are slightly audacious are launched by Sir William, or by his children, she draws herself up at once, and in a tone modulated by gentleness and authority she remarks, "I wish you would not say that." It is with these words that she draws the reins and everyone stops. She is an Irish woman and a Protestant. She is very dark, her face rather hard, but it softens wonderfully when she looks at her husband. I have many a time surprised a glance betraying the anguish of her soul. She follows him everywhere with her eyes, with eyes which know that they will not see him long. She has never spoken to me of her anguish, but she knows that I have guessed it, and there is a constant current of feminine sympathy between us.

To-day was my last Sunday in England. When Sir William told me that they had family prayers at Simley Hall, he said that I was free to attend them if I liked, adding in his caustic tone, "They won't hurt you, you know." I did attend them, and I found great comfort in them. On Sundays, hymns are sung, which Lady Randolph accompanies on the piano. The old butler, the cook, the housemaids all arrive with their little bench and their hymn-books. Sir William, whose vocal cords are already affected, can no longer read the chapter from the Bible. His son or his grandson reads for him, but he always chooses the chapter. The sight of these men kneeling down like little children affects me in spite of myself. This evening my eyes fell on my host and I saw his back. His shoulders were prominent under the cloth, and his smoking-coat hung in the most lamentable manner. He had asked for his favourite hymn to be sung, and in his poor broken voice he repeated the following verse —

"Nearer my God to Thee, nearer to Thee,
E'en though it be a cross that raiseth me,
Still all my song shall be
Nearer my God to Thee, nearer to Thee."

In the mouth of this doomed man these words had a poignant meaning. I felt that he uttered them with a full knowledge of the situation, and that they were his confession of resignation. Nearer to God . . . ah, how near he already was! When the little service was over, the domestics went quietly away, according to their custom, without a word or sign from the family. This always surprises me, and my host caught my look as I watched them leave the room.

"Nice kind of Christianity, isn't it?" he said, in a mocking tone. "We pray together, but we neither say good-morning nor good-night to each other."

"But William," protested Lady Randolph, "you know very well that it would be impossible."

"That is precisely what I deplore. We have an etiquette in flagrant contradiction to our religion and the principles we profess."

"Papa you are a Radical," said Mrs. Loftus, smiling.

"No, but in the presence of foreigners I feel our hardness and how illogical we are. Let us go and look at the stars, Madame de Myères," added Sir William in a brusque tone. "Up there, at least, all seems to be harmony."

*Simley Hall.*

This evening, after dinner, which was earlier than usual on account of a departure, my host and I took our way for the last time to the observatory. Freddy accompanied us as usual. We walked slowly, with our

heads rather bent, as human beings do when they are sad. When we were seated before the open window of the little room I shivered nervously.

"Are you cold?" asked Sir William.

"No, it is the effect of your twilight."

"Do you feel it then, too?"

"Do I feel it? Why, it is extraordinary, uncanny as you say, and never the same. Sometimes it is pleasant, sometimes sinister, grey, black, yellow, like this one; look at it."

The sky was of a transparent lividness. The gleam, made of the gold of the setting sun and the evening mists, gave to the landscape a boreal and mysterious aspect. The foliage looked black, bats came forth from right and left with the haste of starving creatures, big star beetles went hither and thither snapping up late gnats. In the air there was a sort of silence of expectation.

"Nothing would convince me," I said, "that at this hour the space is not entirely peopled. In Rome and in England I have had this sensation of invisible presence."

"Shakespeare, a great many poets, and even simple mortals have had that sensation. There are no painters, I fancy, capable of rendering the atmosphere of one of our twilights."

"Ary Scheffer would, perhaps, have succeeded. Do you know his picture of St. Augustine and Monica?"

My companion's face lighted up with pleasure.

"Do I know it? I have never passed so much time before any other picture. I am glad you mentioned it. On each of our journeys to Paris I have been to the Louvre to see it again. Ary Scheffer is not reckoned among the first artists, and yet that was a stroke of

the brush which I look upon as a veritable revelation. The light on Monica's face is unearthly, it is the reflection of a marvellous vision."

"Yes, and it is because of that light that I have always the photograph of the picture in my bedroom."

"It is enough to make one believe in the Hereafter."

"You don't need that in order to believe in it," I said, smiling.

"Thank God, I know, with Tennyson that I shall see my pilot face to face, when I have crossed the bar."

There was a rather long silence between my companion and me.

"Have you ever imagined the shape of the Universe?" asked Sir William suddenly.

"No; have you?"

"I think I have seen it!"

"Ah, indeed! Where was that?"

"About twenty years ago when I was for the first time in front of the Pyramids. I was greatly impressed. They stood out against the old Egyptian sky with extraordinary clearness. Their mathematical beauty struck me. The idea struck me, too, that perhaps that was the form of the Universe. Between the four triangular faces of the figure I saw millions of human beings moving about, rising and refining themselves, in order to join each other at the same summit, a summit of beauty, perfection and happiness, such as we could not conceive. I said to myself that this symbol of universal life, placed over tombs perhaps signified 'Immortality.'"

"You have, perhaps, guessed rightly," I said. "I have looked at the Pyramids for hours without penetrating the symbol. The sight of them irritated me finally."

"They caused me secret joy, on the contrary."

" You see ' the wind bloweth where it listeth.' What I discern here below is the movement of the shuttle. It seems to me that an invisible hand passes it backwards and forwards through the threads of our existence. When I see it going I look for it coming back. That amuses me like a game."

Sir William began to laugh.

" Your speculations concerning the soul must be curious," he said.

" Well, I think the soul is the holy sacrament of the body."

I saw my host's nostrils dilate.

" The soul . . . the holy sacrament of the body," he repeated.

" Yes, that does not mean anything to you, because you are not a Roman Catholic."

" It means a great deal, on the contrary — go on."

" It envelops the body like a radiant aureole. It transmits to it the inspirations that it receives. And the body, with its marvellous organs of thought, of sensations and action, is its instrument of progress. It is given to it for a minute, an hour, three-quarters of a century. It lasts as long as it is intended to last. It wears out, is broken up, destroyed. Nature supplies the soul with another one. The one that it leaves is transformed, as you know, and life continues, uninterrupted, eternal."

" I can only say, with the Italians, ' If it is not true it is well imagined.' "

" Is it not? " I said with secret complacency. " Anyhow, these are only a woman's speculations. They are probably of no philosophical value. They amuse and console me. I have given them to you, because you wished to hear them."

" And you probably believe in the soul of animals? "

"As I do in my own. There must be souls of species, individual souls and souls of all degrees, a marvellous ladder of them I do not doubt; that ladder, perhaps, the symbol of which Jacob saw in a dream. Do you not feel a psychological bond between yourself and Freddy?"

"Yes, I do feel it. Oh, we understand each other perfectly well, don't we, old boy?" said Sir William.

The fox terrier, who appeared to be asleep, raised his head at once, fixed his speaking eyes on his master, and shook his short tail joyously.

"You see," I said, "even in his sleep, he has not only heard your voice, but caught the caressing tone. It needs more than ears for that."

"You are right."

"The day before yesterday your collie began to bark at a little calf, when passing by the meadow at the bottom of the hill. The mother was grazing a few yards away. She turned round, and then advanced slowly, her gaze fixed on me with an expression that attracted me, as it was so human. I have never seen a finer and more psychological expression in the eyes of a woman mother, for it was that of maternal love, in arms. If it had not been for the high barrier which protected us we should have run real danger. Man has not yet seriously studied animals. He has not looked for the divine spark in them. When he is more perfect he will acquire over the inferior creatures the power which the Bible attributed to him at the beginning of the world. If I have any doubts about the existence of an earthly Paradise, I do not doubt about a future Eden."

"That is something," observed my host, with gentle mockery; and then, after looking at me for a few seconds, he added, "Evidently, if you had had a house to manage, servants to superintend, social relations to keep

up, you would not have had time to look at life in the way you have done."

"No, especially considering my frivolity. Providence literally put me into lodgings in order to oblige me to reflect and to work, but why so late in the day?"

My companion raised his arms and let them fall again.

"Who knows?"

"And I feel myself curiously urged on. I always have the intuition now that I must make haste."

"You are not to be pitied for having been put into lodgings as you call it. The success you have had must cause you some satisfaction?"

"A satisfaction that is very much attenuated, I can assure you. Formerly this success, which I have so little time to enjoy, and of which my own people have never known, would have seemed to me cruel irony, an insult even. At present I know that it could not have happened earlier. Besides, everything has been late in my life. Would you believe that, at the age of forty, I no more felt Nature than if I had been deaf and blind?"

"Is that possible?"

"Absolutely; my physical activity, my absorbing love for M. de Myères rendered me refractory to the all-powerfulness of Nature. The summer after the catastrophe about which you know, I happened to be in Switzerland, at Lucerne. I had always liked walking for the pleasure of movement and the contact with the air. From habit I went every day for my walk, but my pace had become decidedly slower. I went straight along, anywhere, my head bent, and with a heavy tread like a very old woman. I took a book with me to read during my halts, my halts in front of pictures which were full of life and of Divine light. One afternoon I was alone, and lost, as it were, on one of the plains which dominated the

town. Before going down again I was resting at the foot of a tree, and I looked round with my habitual indifference. The sun was sinking in the horizon with unusual splendour. Whilst it filled the West with gold it softened and blended the blues and the greens, and the greys of the east stumped the mountain tops and created mysterious distances. An evening breeze, light and silent, made the meadow grass lie down and stirred the leaves over my head. Not a human being was in this picture. What was taking place? The phenomenon which brings about conversions probably. My gaze was held as though by an invisible force. It seemed to me as though a fluid body were penetrating me, and suddenly I *felt* the sky, the mountain, the warm splendour of the West, the cold sadness of the East. This first communion with Nature was more exquisite than anything you could imagine. It opened to me a source of inexhaustible enjoyment. The cloud which passes, and the play of light, now make me vibrate like a sounding board. There is no doubt but that on this particular day I was put into communion with the soul of the world. I have returned several times on a pilgrimage to the spot where the miracle took place. You see that with this faculty of seeing Nature, which doubles my power of life and my intellectual life, I have something with which to go through old age."

Sir William began to twist Freddy's ears. He looked at me and then hesitated:

"Have you any relatives?" he asked at last.

"No, unless it is the Baroness d'Hauterive," I replied, not without some bitterness.

"You have, of course, some good friends?"

"Yes, but there is not one single friend of my childhood left, not one of those to whom one can say, 'You remember?' I am weeks without speaking

French. It is the most complete isolation in the midst of a crowd, the most profound silence in the midst of noise."

"A very extraordinary life's end," said my host pensively.

He began once more to twist Freddy's ears. I guessed that his interest in me was struggling against that admirable discretion which distinguishes the English character. The interest won the day.

"In case of serious illness, what should you do?" he asked.

"Oh, we have houses where I shall find the necessary care. And I hope," I added smiling, "that Providence has reserved for me a nice Sister of Mercy, one of its gentle collaborators who will close my eyes and dress me for the grave with decency and respect."

Sir William lowered his eyelids and there was another silence between us.

"Is it decided that you will not go to Touraine this year?"

"No, after going to Bagnoles de l'Orne, for the waters, I shall return to Paris, as I said."

"I am sorry."

"Why?"

"Because if you had been at Vouvray I would have asked you to call on the Lussons and take them news of us. I have spoken of you to them. They would have made you welcome at the Commanderie of Rouziers."

"I do not doubt it."

"I should very much like you to know them. Have you any objection?"

"Any objection? No, not exactly," I replied, with some embarrassment; "but I have not time for cultivating social relations."

"It is not a question of social relations, and I fancy that there would soon be great friendship between you and the Lussons. I shall ask them to call on you as soon as they are back in Paris. The daughter will interest you. She has the Latin soul, but in her character the Celtic and Saxon element she has inherited is easily distinguished. She has a generous, active, independent nature, great individuality."

"Is she pretty?"

"Yes, very attractive; very healthy, above all."

"So much the better; nothing delights me as much as that."

"As to the father he will surely win you over. Besides, in my opinion, a Frenchman of good birth who is well bred is perfection."

"Thanks for my countrymen," I said, secretly flattered.

"Shall you spend all the winter in Paris?" asked Sir William.

"Probably, unless you return to Cannes. If so I will join you there in January."

"At Cannes! I don't think I shall be allowed to go. The doctor considers me like a broken table; he fears any shaking that is prolonged. I shall have to give up long journeys. You see, I have always suffered from a lack of light and of the picturesque. Those are the things which for years I have gone in search of in France, Italy and the East. When I have revelled in them for two or three months I am glad to return to see our rich verdure again, our magnificent trees, and with fine human ingratitude I say rabidly, 'After all, there is no country equal to old England.' You will come again to Simley, I hope."

"If you invite me, certainly."

"If I do not invite you, it will be for a good reason."

These words were accompanied by a smile painful to see.

"My son will take my place. He will be very happy to welcome you. He is more and more interested in astronomy. That gives me great pleasure, as I am glad to think this little observatory will not be useless."

My host looked round with a long, sad gaze, which he fixed finally on me.

"Do you believe that we ever find again those whom we have lost?"

"Oh, we find them again, not, however, as we do in the fifth act of our melodramas; still, we may be placed in the same circle, and continue our evolution together. For instance, I fancy that you and I are very old friends. If it were not so you would not have ventured to tease me the first moment we met as you did. You would not have invited me to Simley Hall and I should not have made my confession to you. Our meeting, I am convinced, has not been useless, and it will take place again elsewhere."

"Ah well, I hope, then, that it will be less brief," said my host gently.

"I hope so, too."

It was now quite dark, as our strange conversation had been broken by long silences.

Sir William looked up at the starry firmament.

"You want to say farewell to your stars, I suppose?" he said, his voice slightly broken.

I answered by a nod in the affirmative. He rose, and I followed him into the observatory. He had soon put the telescope in position.

"No mist this evening," he said; "a night made for you."

No, there was no mist, and the beautiful centres of light and life shone with rare brilliancy. I was not long before I felt myself penetrated with and enveloped in the peace and silence of the Infinite. I heard distinctly — oh, so distinctly! — the seconds that the sidereal clock above me counted. It was fantastic, these seconds of earth, sounding one by one in the midst of immensity. And I was conscious that they were not lost, that they were going to join the seconds of all these other worlds, that, in reality, they sounded up there. I sent a mute adieu to my favourite stars and it was with difficulty that I could tear myself away from a contemplation which filled my soul with admiration, joy and hope.

"Supposing that you could choose, to which planet of our solar system would you go on leaving the earth?" asked Sir William, when I had come down from the platform.

"To Jupiter," I replied.

"That's unfortunate, for astronomers affirm that it is not habitable."

"They may be mistaken; it would not be the first time. About thirty years ago, at the commencement of experiments with magnetism, one of my father's friends, who had extraordinary power, sent one of his farmer's sons to sleep, a boy of fifteen years old. Several times, at my request, he put me into communication with him. One day the idea occurred to me to send him to Mars. His face at once expressed abject terror, real suffering. By an effort of will I hurried him to Jupiter and there it was delight that he felt. He saw things which I will not repeat, because they would seem absurd to you, but they made me wish to be sent there."

"Let it be Jupiter, then," said Sir William, with a smile.

This jesting, which hid our mutual emotion, ended the conversation. We went back to the house slowly and silently, both of us aware that we had just had our last communion in this world.

## V

### PARIS

*Hotel de Castiglione.*

They were all at the station, the parents, the grandparents, the grandchildren, Kim and Freddy, the two fox terriers. And, towering above the group by his tall figure Sir William stood there, impassive, his nostrils dilating with the effort of breathing. His eyes, which know, said to me *adieu* and not *au revoir*. That was very painful. Claude Randolph went with me to London. His father had told him to take me to dine at the Carlton, and then to a café concert to make up for the austerity of Simley Hall. We went, but during the whole of the evening I saw nothing but the starry field, the little observatory, and the solitary figure of the friend whom I had left. Beside that picture, the dining-room of the Carlton, with its worldly men and women, the large music-hall with its actors, all gave me an impression such as I had never experienced of lower life. I left the following day. The heat was intense, and London nearly empty. Paris was in the same state. I was in a hurry to commence my cure at Bagnoles. Every year I must have a good season at a watering-place. This macerating of the body in spring water, which is full of purifying elements, seems to me necessary to health. I had decided to go to Aix-les-Bains, and then I was impelled towards a spot the very name of which I did not know two months before. The secretary and the

housekeeper of the Hôtel de Castiglione, two straightforward, intelligent people, had the brilliant idea of marrying each other, and had been appointed to manage the Grand Hôtel at Bagnoles. After giving me an alluring description of the country round, they persuaded me to go there, offering me a bedroom and sitting room in the part of the hotel which had been allotted to them. This tempted me as I knew they would do all in their power to make me comfortable. I am beginning to feel a vague need of protection, and this is a bad sign. I bought, and had framed, one of Braun's beautiful carbon photographs of Monica and St. Augustine, by Ary Scheffer, and sent it to Sir William. I wanted him to have that wonderful ray from the other world, so that it might give him hope, as it has done to so many others. Oh, how much a stroke of the artist's brush may contain!

And now *en route* for the famous Bagnoles-de-l'Orne.

## VI

### BAGNOLES-DE-L'ORNE

*Grand Hotel, Bagnoles-de-l'Orne.*

Ah, I knew very well that it would have an epilogue, my grievous calamity! The theatre, as a dramatic author said to me the other day, is the art of preparations, and life is certainly the science of them. We do not study closely enough the chain work of circumstances, the admirable progression which leads to decisive events. All that I had told Sir William had prepared me unawares for what was awaiting me here. I arrived at Bagnoles by the last train. On leaving my compartment I found myself among scenery of almost unreal beauty, depths of vast forest, a slumbering lake, a church on the heights, houses scattered about, white roads, and the whole divinely lighted by the warm brilliancy of a summer moon.

The manager and his wife were awaiting me at the station. I was glad to see them there. They took me to the hotel, which was only a few yards away, and showed me the rooms they had prepared for me. All was new, simple and charming. In the little drawing-room, Madame Lima had neither forgotten the large, substantial writing-table nor the sofa, which are both so necessary to me. There were, besides, some forest flowers and a tray with cold meat, fruit and milk. My first impression was so pleasant that I congratulated myself mentally on having accepted the proposal of these good people. I should probably not have been

allowed to have done otherwise. It took the whole of the following morning to install myself. I pinned up my photographs, my *Notre Dame de la Victoire* (the Victory of Samothrace) opposite my bed, and I fastened my *gris-gris* up here and there. I took from my trunks the books which are my inseparable companions, those pages written "on the branch" and which are already numerous. I then prepared my writing table, and all that with a childish pleasure, with that pathetic ignorance, which the human being has, of events which are about to happen. I went downstairs towards noon and, after walking through the rooms and admiring the beautiful view from the terrace, I returned, quite satisfied, and sat down in the hall to watch "the guests," as the Americans call them, file by, and to find out into what *milieu* I had been sent. I had been there for a few minutes when, suddenly, I felt a violent shock. I made a movement forwards, my hands seemed to become incrusted in the arms of my chair and my eyes remained fixed on the corridor, where I had just seen an apparition, a tall young man in riding-dress with whip in hand. He had come in through the gateway, and had passed quickly in front of me. His mountaineer hat was pushed back and showed his face, the living face of M. de Myères! I remained there, as though thunderstruck, for a few seconds, then, rising, all tottering as I was, I went to the hall porter.

"Who is that young man?" I asked.

The Baron d'Hauterive I was told. My husband's son! Had I not seen it! Had I not felt it!

"His mother has been here for some weeks," continued Louis. "Poor lady, she was so ill when she arrived that she had to be carried from the station to the hotel. Now she can walk alone, and she goes round

the terrace and into the garden every day. A good advertisement for the Bagnoles waters!"

"Where are her rooms?"

"On the ground-floor. She has a suite of rooms — No. 10."

Colette, too, there — quite near me!

At that moment the manager approached to show me into the dining-room. I followed him mechanically and took the seat he gave me. The immense room had panes of glass along one side. The light caused me a disagreeable sensation. It was as though it fell on a naked wound. I did not distinguish anyone. My eyes remained rivetted on the door with the desire and fear of seeing Guy d'Hauterive enter. I could not endure this tension very long, and left the table before the end of luncheon. I went up to my room and, by a curious instinct, turned the key in my door, as I always do when under the sway of any agitation. I commenced walking up and down, stopping now and then to touch some object or change its place. Ever since I had disciplined my mind to consider the human being as a simple factor, my hatred for Colette had changed to pity. I was sure that she, too, had suffered very much. Several times even I had had a secret wish to see her again. I had not, however, foreseen the double trial which awaited me, the meeting of the mother and of the son. The existence of the latter had remained intolerable to me, like a live thorn in my heart. The news of his death would certainly have been a relief to me. During the last two years, at the theatre, at the Concours Hippique, whilst taking tea at the Ritz, I had been haunted by the fear of distinguishing in the crowd a young man with the features of M. de Myères. The unexpected sight of him, his outrageous resemblance, provoked in me a sort of sex anger which was stronger than all my phi-

losophy, and, to my own horror, made me descend to the level of the woman of the harem or of the tent.

Suddenly my gaze was directed towards the "Victory of Samothrace." She seemed to be coming to meet me, her wings joyously outstretched, her step light. Her beauty seemed to emit a ray of Divine light and my feminine jealousy suddenly appeared to me vile and paltry so that my mind rose above it. I was struck by the chain of events which had brought me to Bagnoles. One would have to be singularly dense only to see there the effect of chance. I had been pushed along towards Colette like a piece on a chess-board. What was the reason of this move? I could not tell yet, but a painful meeting seemed inevitable. There was nothing to prevent my avoiding it. In less than an hour I could have my trunk packed again. The train was there — a few steps away, whistling in my ears, offering to take me wherever I liked. Was I not free? Free — no, I was held back by curiosity to see the work of these fifteen last years on my cousin, by the wretched vanity of showing myself, old, yes, but in the plenitude of my faculties, with the little halo that literary success had given me. Was I not held back, too, by the desire of seeing the son of M. de Myères again, of hearing the sound of his voice, of knowing just how far it was he! These sentiments chained me there more effectually than material bonds could have done. No, I will not go away, Providence has decided otherwise. God has willed it; God wishes it! What security and what force there is in that conviction! Wearied out by the violence of the inward storm I had just weathered, I lay down on my sofa and tried to familiarise myself with the idea of seeing Colette again. Was she as ill as the hall-porter said? Had I been sent here to bring her peace? If so, I would certainly give it her at any cost. I saw her again with

her dull, warm complexion like white velvet, her magnificent black eyes, her smiling, kind lips. Memories of childhood and youth emerged from all the circumvolutions of my brain. They showed me a woman ardent and impulsive, but frank and good. How? When? Where? This triangle of questions came again to my mind for the hundred thousandth time. I was to know at last. And the fresh trial was only, perhaps, like so many others, a blessing in disguise. In what way had Providence arranged for our meeting? Would Colette come to me? Should I go to her? This question was scarcely formulated when someone knocked at my door. It was one of the pages.

"From Madame la Baronne d'Hauterive," he said, presenting me with a letter on a salver.

The unformed, delicate hand-writing, recognisable among a thousand, caused my heart to beat violently. She knew, then, she too, that we were under the same roof. And this is what she wrote to me:

"Antone, a week ago, Madame Lima, the Manager's wife, told me that Jean Noël was coming here and told me too the author's real name was Madame de Myères! I have not yet recovered from this revelation, and I have been waiting for you with anguish mixed with joy, such as you cannot imagine. You — the novelist whose books have moved me so deeply! It is too beautiful, inconceivable. I have forgotten everything else. God brings us together again after fifteen years. I can guess what this favour forebodes. I came to Bagnoles to get up my strength for an operation for tumour which is to take place early in September. It depends on you whether I am to face death without terror. Grant me this interview for which I have so often begged in vain. Madame de Myères may be implacable — Jean Noël must be able to forgive. It is to him that I appeal. Will he

receive me to-morrow afternoon — and at what time?"

Tears started from my eyes and these tears for Colette refreshed my heart like dew. I replied at once: "Jean Noël will expect you to-morrow at four. Do not be afraid to come." I was rather surprised that she should have fixed the next day instead of this one. Was it not prolonging our anxiety uselessly? When once my note was sent I felt an urgent need of fresh air, and put on my hat to go out and reconnoitre. On leaving the Grand Hôtel I found myself in the scenery of the night before, but by sunlight it had lost something of its beauty. The little church, admirably situated, which one reaches by a monumental flight of steps with a double turning, is of cast zinc. It looked as though it had been made of sardine boxes. In the midst of this exquisite panorama it seems more out of place than it would elsewhere. Whoever built it could not have had the sense of Catholic worship nor any sense of art whatever. The landscape, on the other hand, delighted me. It seemed to me that this watering-place was in an immense forest glade. After a few minutes I came to an avenue where the sunshine could not penetrate. It had been pretentiously named "Dante's Avenue," and it leads to the bathing establishment. I felt at once, the exquisite quality of the air. I opened my nostrils to absorb still more of it. These odours of larches, beeches and pines, did me good instantaneously. Nature, at times so cruel, can be kind. It was so at that moment for me. It gave me the perfume of its best trees, its best champagne. Under its action my chest expanded, my heart and my step grew lighter. I came out into a park, at the entrance of which were the bathing establishment and a newly-built hotel. I sat down under the verandah and took tea, looking anxiously each way, expecting to see Guy d'Hauterive emerge from one avenue or another.

The sun disappeared early behind the wooded heights, and the damp coolness which followed compelled me to go back again. After looking to see where I was, I returned by a different path. It led me to the edge of the lake, over a stone bridge, and from there into the garden of the Grand Hôtel, the front of which was still brilliantly lighted.

I went slowly up the wide steps and arrived on the terrace, which was entirely deserted except for one woman who was lying back in an armchair. I went a few steps in her direction and then suddenly, with a pang at my heart stood still.

"Colette!"

"Antone!"

The recognition had been simultaneous. Madame d'Hauterive uttered my name like an appeal. She made an effort to stand up, but fell back again. I went to her and put my hand on hers.

"Here I am," I said to her.

Her eyes filled with tears.

"I am glad to see you again," she murmured.

I drew a chair forward and sat down. Colette's hair was nearly white; she had the livid pallor of a doomed woman; lips without a vestige of colour! The sight of her caused the deepest pity in my soul.

"I hear," I said, "that the Bagnoles waters have done you a great deal of good."

"Yes, I could not walk when I arrived. At Lourdes I was looked upon as a person on whom a miracle had been wrought — and I really am now as you are here," she added, lowering her voice. "Shall we go to my rooms?" she said, her cheeks flushing slightly.

I nodded and she rose, not without difficulty, and with a slow step led me towards the end of the terrace where her rooms were situated. As soon as we were in her draw-

ing-room she turned towards me, gazed at me silently for a few seconds and then said —

"You look very well — I am glad," and instantaneously obeying one of her irresistible impulses, she flung her arms round my neck and clung to me. "Antone! forgive me, forgive me!" she repeated, with a passionate accent.

It had often happened to her to ask my forgiveness in this way, after some fit of anger or after unjust words. It was a curious thing, but her action made me think of her in the old days and, forgetting her cruel offence, I put my arms round her and soothed her as I used to do. I was living over again a former moment probably. Am I not right in saying that we are marvels? Visibly exhausted, she sank down in an arm-chair, and pointing to a chair for me, said:

"Do sit down, won't you?"

She was wrapped in a mantle of black taffeta, all trimmed with silk muslin. It showed up in relief her head, which looked like a cameo, her face, ravaged by disease, in which the eyes, so full of intense light, shone brilliantly.

"How good you are! Have you become a believer?" she asked naïvely.

"Yes," I answered.

An expression of joy came over her face.

"I am no longer surprised then," she said.

"Life has given me faith."

"Life! It has very often nearly taken mine away. Oh, very often," she added, bitterly.

"Because you have not studied it long enough."

"Perhaps. Any way it is surely God who has brought us together again, here. He has condemned me to die, so that He certainly owed me that."

"To die! People do not die of an operation."

"No, not always," said the poor woman, with a nervous smile. She looked at me again, and then continued:

"And so you are this Jean Noël, to whom I have so often been tempted to write. Fancy becoming a novelist and making a name at your age! Nothing has ever caused me such surprise."

"I am astonished at it myself," I said.

"You see," observed Colette, with a pathetic accent, "people *can* do good or bad things, of which they would have believed themselves incapable."

"I know it."

"And your novels — they affected me and moved me as no others ever did. Certain phrases seemed to have been written for me!"

"They perhaps were, without my being aware of it — Life is still such a mystery to us."

Colette rose and went to fetch a volume with a yellow cover from the table. It was my last book.

"Look," she said, "how attentively this has been read." She showed me the pages turned down and marked, and then, opening it at a certain place, she pointed out a paragraph to me. "You really believe that?" she asked with an anxious look.

"Absolutely."

"So much the better, so much the better! Then, I can tell you all."

An instinctive fear of further suffering dominated the desire, the need I had to know.

"Oh, no confessions," I exclaimed, "what is the use?"

"To clear Guy's memory, to make me seem less odious. You no doubt thought that I exercised my damnable coquetry on your husband in order to take him from you, and that our *liaison* lasted years?"

"Could I believe anything else after reading that note

which informed me that Guy was the son of M. de Myères?"

Colette flinched.

"That is true. Well we were not as base as we seemed. There was no premeditation on either side. You remember that M. de Myères and I were always good comrades. We were too familiar perhaps. He had a curious power of rousing my spirits. I never did and said so many foolish things as when he was present. I amused him and he delighted in teasing me. To him and to all of you I was only a brilliant, spoiled creature, whose words and deeds were not of any consequence. Did you not nickname me 'The Linnet?' Well, a linnet can feel and suffer all the same," said Madame d'Hauterive, with an attempt at a smile. "One day at your house at Chavigny, Guy was ready to go out shooting. He was on horseback, just by the stone steps, exchanging some gay farewell words with us. Impelled by I cannot tell what nonsense I suddenly put my foot into his right stirrup and said foolishly, 'Take me with you.' 'I'll take you,' he answered, and bending down he put his arm round my waist, lifted me up to his saddle, and, intending to kiss my cheek, touched the corner of my mouth, and then put me down again on the ground. It was all done so quickly, with such strength and dexterity, that you began to clap your hands."

"I remember it," I said, not without a slight pang at my heart.

"It was the beginning of all our trouble that you were applauding. If you had known that, how you would have grieved! But you did not know! Such things are what confound my reason and shake my faith!"

"They make things clearer to me," I said.

Colette's hands moved about nervously, and she continued —

"An Italian proverb declares that a kiss is never lost. Well, that one was not. M. de Myères had kissed me hundreds of times. What was there in me, in the atmosphere of that precise moment, for that ordinary kiss to impress and affect me so deeply? I have often wondered. It acted like a poison, like a spell. The presence of Guy began to disturb me. His looks, his words made more and more impression on me. He soon noticed this change and, without any idea of harm, amused himself with playing on my awakened sensibility. He provoked me, and I defied him in the most foolish, imprudent manner. I thought myself so thoroughly protected by my principles, by my affection for Henri, by my friendship for you. The misfortune is that we do not know the forces of Nature, and that we consider life in too ideal a way."

"What you say is perfectly right."

"Oh, I have thought about all this so much since," said Colette with a bitter accent.

"Science will help us to explain things," I said.

"God grant it. Then, too, while treating me as a spoiled child, you all kept me from taking myself seriously. I did not think this flirtation was dangerous either for myself or for Guy. I reckoned without circumstances, and they betrayed us treacherously. One day in the autumn M. de Myères came alone to 'Les Rocheilles.' You had broken your arm, falling from your horse, and preferred staying at Chavigny."

"Yes, I remember that Guy did not want to leave me. I had to insist on his starting alone."

"You see, you see," said Madame d'Hauterive, rubbing her clasped hands together.

"I see, dear, that we were always led."

"The first week of his visit we went to spend an afternoon at the Lagnys, Uncle Georges, Aunt Lucie, the

Montbruns, M. de Myères and I. Henri was, of course obliged to stay at home. The weather, later on, was so threatening that they would not let us start back. This improvised night's lodging made us all very gay. There were only two spare rooms in the *Château* and these were given to the Montbruns so that we were put up in the summer house at the end of the park. Uncle Georges and Aunt Lucie were on the first floor and Guy and I had the two rooms on the ground floor —"

Here Colette stopped. Waves of emotion passed over her face and her lips moved without being able to utter a word.

" And it was there? " I said, with all the pity of a confessor.

My cousin bowed her head.

" It was there," she continued in a hollow voice. " And everything led up to it, an exciting game at poker, the champagne, the storm which broke with extraordinary violence, many other things, too, no doubt, for I was not really bad, was I? " she asked with a pathetic accent.

" Certainly not, but there were dangerous elements in you."

" I was not aware of them. When I go back to that time it seems to me that I was an absolute baby. My parents had married me very well, I must own, but my kind, handsome Henri had never been able to inspire me with anything but a great friendship. I had always needed emotion and excitement, I wanted to feel that I was living. Instinctively, perhaps, I sought for love as all human creatures do. To some it is granted, to others forbidden. Why is this? Ah, how many of these *Whys* I have asked in my life! " said Colette with something of her old drollery. " I talk of love, but Guy never loved me! He did not take me seriously any more than all of

you did. He blamed me for having tempted him to deceive you."

"I am not surprised at that. A weak man always throws the blame on others for his own faults or failures," I answered, with involuntary anger.

"His indifferenec exasperated me, his visible remorse provoked my wrath. What a pair of lovers we were!" said Madame d'Hauterive with irony. "In your first novel you described the sufferings of the mistress. How could you imagine all that, you who were the wife?"

"By intuition probably."

"Ah, well, I have experienced them. Six months after Guy's birth, a cruel scene, provoked no doubt purposely by M. de Myères, gave me the courage to break off with him. He went away to Algeria with you. I persuaded Henri to leave Paris altogether and I took up my abode at 'Les Rocheilles.' I should have eaten my heart out with remorse and dullness if Providence had not sent me a wonderful priest, a man who understood human nature, a healer of souls. He neither insisted on penitence nor on prayers for me, but he made me turn my thoughts away from myself and think of others. He helped me by opening my eyes to the ignorance of our peasants, to the want of hygiene and cleanliness which ruins our country places. Under his guidance I began, in our neighbourhood, a work of civilisation which interested me all the time more and more passionately. I became that modern lady of the manor, about whom you were always joking. This new phase which you called 'Colette's conversion' was in reality Colette's expiation. You have the key now to my apparent oddities, to the uncertainty of my welcome, to my manner towards your husband. His presence was for a long time intolerable to me. He did his utmost to avoid coming. The differ-

ence of political opinions between him and Henri created a coolness between them which made things more easy. My love was over but not my remorse and the existence of Guy made this very keen. Ah, you see, they always talk to a woman of purity, but never of honour. She is taught nothing of what she ought to know. If she were impressed with the idea that she is responsible to the world at large for the integrity of race, she would feel greater, more sacred, she would not make herself so cheap."

"You are right; she is not yet conscious of what she is in Nature, of what she might be in Life."

"M. de Myères adored the child," continued Madame d'Hauterive, in a broken voice. "He often begged me to bring the boy to see him. I dared not refuse. Before he was taken ill he had written to me to ask this with a curious urgency that was perhaps a presentiment. When writing to tell him of my arrival at the Hotel V— I asked him to be more careful of what he said, adding that he had terrified me the last time he had paid me a visit, and that the child, who was very precocious might remember his words later on. . . . If you remember, there was not a word of love in that note."

"That is true, but I saw nothing in it but the one bare fact."

"That fact," repeated Madame d'Hauterive. "Oh, Antone, I am surprised that that revelation did not kill you on the spot."

"My task was not accomplished, probably. But how did you know of the death of M. de Myères? I never understood that."

"As he did not appear at the time appointed, I sent the page from the Hôtel V— to ask at the Club if he were away, and there he was told what had happened. I

hurried to you, and you remember the rest. If you had granted me the interview for which I have asked for five years you would have suffered less."

"No, for I was not ready to listen to you."

Colette looked at me with an expression that was suddenly anxious, her eyes filled with distress, and her lips quivered nervously.

"Antone," she said, in a muffled voice, "Guy is here with me."

"I know," I replied tranquilly, "I saw him this morning."

"You recognised him!" exclaimed Madame d'Hauterive, her eyes growing larger with terror.

I nodded.

"And you are here?"

"I am here by the will of Providence. It has taken fifteen years to bring me here."

"That is true," murmured Colette.

"Providence works slowly, but surely. To-day I know that we have both lived out our destinies. It is not for me to judge your responsibility. In all that you have confessed to me I only distinguish the action of a higher force and I see that transmutation of evil into good which always has to take place here or elsewhere. Without all this you would have remained a frivolous, useless woman. Your repentance put into activity qualities which no one suspected. Have you not accomplished miracles for ten miles round 'Les Rocheilles'? As for me, if I had not been uprooted, I should have vegetated in a small flat in Paris, I should have grown old in a poor way."

"And you would not have become Jean Noël."

"The world would not have lost anything by that, but I should not have known the joy of intellectual work, I should not have acquired the understanding of Life

which is priceless. I consider that your trial has been greater than mine."

"Hasn't it, oh, hasn't it?" said Madame d'Hauterive eagerly.

At that moment the sound of a footstep on the terrace caught our ears, and, in the midst of the poignant silence which it caused, Guy d'Hauterive appeared on the step of the French window. Colette's eyelids drooped with shame, a wave of pale blood rushed to her face. That second must have been one of the most cruel in her life. The young man gazed at me an instant.

"Madame de Myères," he exclaimed, "I recognise you."

His voice, too, the voice that had been mute fifteen years!

"You recognise me because you knew that I was to arrive, probably," I said, with a desperate effort to govern my emotion.

"No, no, there is a portrait of you at 'Les Rocheilles' in Uncle Georges' study, and then, too, you gave me too many sweets and playthings for me to have been able to forget you. I have often asked for you, have I not, Mother?"

"Yes, really," answered Colette.

"Later on I was told that there had been some disagreements, some family quarrel, and that you were travelling. You would never have recognised me, though, would you?"

Not recognised him — good Heavens!

"To recognise a child of ten years old in a grown-up man is more difficult," I said.

"I should think so," answered Guy with a flash of pride, as he drew up an armchair and put it near mine.

"And so you are Jean Noël! Do you know I took your first novel to 'Les Rocheilles!' It caused endless

discussions there. No one agreed about the sex of the author. We little thought he belonged to the family. And it was at Bagnoles of all places in the world that we were to learn his real name and our relationship to him. I never saw mother so excited. By-the-bye, I hope you have made peace?"

"It would have been made a long time ago if I had not been living as a nomad and rather as an egotist."

"Well, you are captured again by the family now. We shall not let you escape, and I fancy that we shall become friends," he added, with a smile.

My heart stopped beating — M. de Myères' smile, too!

"All things are possible," I stammered.

Under this light talk there was such a current of painful sensations and grievous memories that the very air became suffocating. I rose, and Colette followed my example.

"Oh, Madame de Myères," exclaimed Guy, "do stay a little longer. Let me see you at least!"

"To-morrow we shall see each other," I replied hastily.

"To-morrow, no —— I'm leaving for Houlgate. I shall be away for two or three days," he said, with a shade of embarrassment. "Mother is so well that I have no scruples about leaving her, and now that you are here I shall go away feeling quite at ease."

"You may," I said.

"When I come back we will have a talk, won't we?"

He held out his hand and I was obliged to give him mine. He raised it to his lips, and that kiss entered into me and produced a wave of exquisite suffering which made me shudder. I met Colette's eyes. They were so full of mute supplication that, spontaneously, I put my arms round her neck, and my cheek against hers — one of our old embraces.

"The worst is over," I whispered to her and then aloud I added, "Good-bye — till to-morrow."

In spite of my protestations Guy insisted on accompanying me to the lift. I arrived in my own rooms, trembling from head to foot, like a horse which, under the master's spur has just cleared a dreaded obstacle.

*Bagnoles-de-l'Orne.*

My cousin's confession has had a curious effect on me. It was a sort of gauge, and I am not precisely proud of the results. It was not a matter of indifference to me to learn that her *liaison* with M. de Myères was only of short duration. My vanity now suffers less, and at times I feel almost joyous. But then, I hear her words again — "All things led up to it, an exciting game of poker, the champagne, the storm which burst with extraordinary force. . . .!" and I see her, frightened, clinging to him. I see him putting his arms round her, holding her there — oh, of course he held her there, I see this — I see it with that power of vision which Jean Noël has acquired, and a whirlwind of anger overturns everything within my soul. I do not bear her any grudge — not her, but him. And then that resemblance. Near to, it is perhaps less striking. The large forehead, the nose, the chin remind me of my cousin's father, but the brown hair, the tawny moustache, the shadow which softens the corner of the blue eyes, the delicate, sensual mouth, the smile, the height! All that is M. de Myères. Is not love necessary, real love, in order to be reproduced like this? I wondered, and a painful blush rose to my face. All through life, here below, the human creature makes efforts to stand upright morally. Some die without having succeeded. I have certainly just fallen down again on all fours and it is this wretched

femininity which has caused me to do so. No matter, I will stand up again. Up — up! *Sursum corda!*

Yesterday and to-day I spent part of the afternoon with Colette on the terrace of the hotel. Poor woman! Her blood, formerly so rich, appears to be irremediably impoverished, her splendid vitality destroyed for ever. As she now is, in her suffering and affliction, she appears to me more interesting than formerly. Her charm has not left her, and her languid movements have retained their grace. With her dress of black silk muslin, entirely pleated and loose in front, her pearl necklace and an elegant mantle thrown over her shoulders she is delicious. I told her so and the compliment brought an expression of pleasure to her face.

"A grey linnet, you see," she said with a melancholy smile, touching her beautiful, wavy hair.

In these first days of our meeting again the absence of Guy was a relief to both of us. Conversation was rather difficult to us. We had so much to say, and we did not know where to begin. Then, afterwards, we felt ourselves so far, so very far away from each other. At times we just looked at each other without speaking, astonished at having become strangers. The threads of our lives seemed as though they could not join again across the weavings of these last fifteen years, and then, imperceptibly, the marvellous work was suddenly accomplished. Colette spoke to me with deep feeling about the death of her husband, about her sorrow. She has been a widow three years. Henri and his brother Georges, the d'Hauterive twins, as they were called, had never been separated. The latter has consecrated his life, his science, to the improvement of the family domain. He is at work there still, with the help of an experienced cultivator. Robert, my cousin's eldest son, is a brilliant cavalry officer. She hopes that later on he will be lord

of the manor at "Les Rocheilles" and will continue there the work of his father and uncle. Colette's confidences concerning the family stopped there. I felt that she did not dare to mention Guy. I had a curious desire to know something about him, about his character, and I brought him into the conversation. The mother gave me a touching look of thanks.

"Up to the present, everything has been right with him," she said, in rather a muffled voice. "He passed his examinations brilliantly. After his military service he went for a voyage of eighteen months round the world, and he stayed for a year at the Pinharas. He is now attending the lectures of the Grignon school for the pure love of it. My dream for him is some big agricultural enterprise, either in France or in Tunis. He came into the entire fortune of his godmother, but until he is thirty can only receive half of his income. He is so well provided for that he could leave 'Les Rocheilles' for his brother," added Madame d'Hauterive, blushing slightly, "and I do not doubt but that he will do it."

I understood that this arrangement would lighten her conscience.

"Is he good to you?" I asked.

Colette's face lighted up with affection.

"He is perfect. A daughter could not have more care and forethought."

"He looks intelligent."

"He is, oh yes, he is, and so brave and strong."

"He has your father's square chin."

"Yes, you noticed that? It is just what consoles me. He won't be weak!" added the poor woman with an expression of pride.

By tacit accord we went quickly back over the intervening years to our young days. When once there we

were ourselves again. A crowd of pleasant memories, stored I know not where, awoke one after the other and chased away the phantom which was between us. With that faculty of duality which I have acquired whilst Madame de Myères talked, Jean Noël saw the amphitheatre of verdure, the lake streaked with light, the white terrace shaded by a group of trees and in the midst of this scenery of harmonious melancholy, two elderly women, meeting again after fifteen years of separation, going along slowly evoking the past and drawing from it a moment's joy and oblivion. The novelist took into account the time and the forces which this little human scene represented, and was once more struck with admiration at the work of the Master.

"Oh, we were wholesome good little creatures," added Colette, after turning over one or two pages of our girlhood.

"Rather alarming, all the same, with our precocious coquetry. Wasn't it you who first had the intuition of the ugliness of our underclothes in those days, and organised the revolution in chemises?"

"The revolution in chemises?"

"Certainly. One fine day you took it into your head, standing at your glass, no doubt, that they were frightful. You proposed to me that the sleeves should be suppressed and that they should be shortened. You may claim for yourself the idea of the transformation which was doomed to take place later on. We carried it out in secret and were delighted at the effect. In spite of our precautions for delaying the discovery of our experiment, your fond mother found our new specimen in your chest of drawers. I was present and I remember her asking the maid what it was. 'Mademoiselle's underlinen' said Françoise. 'That!' exclaimed your mother, with an expression which still makes me laugh

when I think of it. She held the garment up between her fingers and thumb and turning to me, asked: 'Can you explain this to me?' 'Yes, aunt,' I said, 'Colette and I want to alter our underlinen. All the garments are so hideous and make us look so unpoetical.' The words appeared so comic to your mother that her anger gave way, but we were lectured all the same and forbidden ever to touch our trousseaux again."

Colette laughed heartily.

"Oh, I remember, I remember," she said. "But you, too, did not want to look 'unpoetical.' How often you reproached your poor aunt for putting you into a yellow bed-jacket when you had measles. I wonder how it came about that two provincial girls, such as we were, should have felt this need of elegance. You tied ribbons everywhere, and you were always moving the furniture about in your bed-room. The carpet squares that used to be put before each chair in the drawing room made your hair stand on end. One day, when they had been imprudent enough to take us to the house of an old lady, you began to push all these little carpets under the chairs and armchairs with your feet. I followed your example and in no time the polished floor was bare. The lady of the house was half blind and did not notice what we were doing, but your mother had seen and all the way home we were scolded. There's no denying it, we were two born modernists. You have kept up with the movement of the times."

"Thank God, I have. I am as interested in the progress of science, in discoveries, in the future of the world, as though I were to live in it for centuries. The day when my skiff will no longer be able to follow, I shall be glad to go away."

My cousin reminded me of the garret where we spent

rainy days, the dear garret full of odd things. There was old furniture with which we made drawing-rooms and there was a certain cedar-wood chest containing our great-grandmother's dresses, which we put on when we were acting.

"Acting was your strong point," added Colette. "When I think of the stories you invented, the adventures you arranged for your favourite hero, Robinson Crusoe, I ought not to be surprised that you should have become a novelist. Jean Noël existed then within you."

"He had probably existed a long time. How I did dream of big voyages, of freedom! I used to go and stand in front of the gipsies' caravans, hoping to be stolen. Gaillard's stage-coach from Paris to Geneva, fascinated me; I used to escape, so that I could watch the horses being changed. No one ever suspected how tempted I was to creep under the seats. It seemed to me that the coach must be taking the people to wonderful countries. I have now been these long voyages, I have the liberty I wanted, my trunk takes no longer to pack than a tent to fold. You see, I fancy that we come into the world with our brains ready for our respective destinies. We begin to live our destinies instinctively by our pronounced tastes, our aspirations, our desires, and then the vocation becomes evident. The future sometimes affects us. We can feel and suffer beforehand."

Madame d'Hauterive suddenly appeared troubled; she looked at me, her eyes filled with tears to the brim and the tears made her more beautiful, as in the olden days.

"It was that then!" she murmured.

"What?" I asked, surprised.

"One day you rushed into my father's study with your doll in your arms crying out: 'Monsieur, Mon-

sieur a wicked woman has stolen my husband!' It was only in play, but suddenly you began to sob, and we had the greatest difficulty to calm you. Antone, I was that wicked woman!"

I laid my hand affectionately on my cousin's.

"Well then," I said, "that episode which I had forgotten, absolves you once more."

"Life is cruel, abominable!" exclaimed Madame d'Hauterive. "I understood, later on, your rebellion against it."

"The rebellion of an ignorant person," said I, smiling. "Oh, I am not proud of all that. One of our old Marianne's speeches has often come back to my mind. One day on hearing me repeat my usual remark 'If I were God I would do this or that,' she gave a mocking wink and said 'You are not bad-natured, Mademoiselle, but I would rather be in God's hands than in yours!' And she was quite right."

"In spite of your optimism," observed Colette, "you cannot deny that there are in the world claws, teeth, poisons, microbes, nameless horrors."

"There is a great deal of pain, I know," I answered. "My heart is constantly bleeding for one or another. But I have acquired the conviction that the shoulders are fashioned for each burden, and that suffering is necessary."

"Suffering necessary? You believe that?" asked Madame d'Hauterive.

"Absolutely. In my novels, for instance, it was not possible to have anything great without that. In order to bring my heroes to give their full measure I often had to put their souls under the pressure of inferior forces, to make use of envy, ingratitude, passion of all kinds, of evil sentiments and I then obtained splendid moral reactions. One day I was fascinated by the work

of a painter struggling with the red of a woman's hair. On his palette he had black, red, green and ochre and he was dipping his brush in, delicately, as though at hazard. I guessed there would be a secret and violent battle between these various tones of colour and then gradually, I do not know by what magic, and the artist himself confessed to me that he did not know, the colours blended and the beautiful shade exactly, lighted up the canvas. The right colour had come. This is how Nature proceeds, I suppose, in order to arrive at harmony. This is how she works. She has all eternity, and so have we, too, so that some day all will be right."

"What things you have learnt," said Colette, with an expression of astonishment.

"I had to learn a great deal in order to acquire faith."

At that moment a telegram was brought to my cousin. On reading it her lips contracted slightly.

"From Guy," she said; "he asks if he may stay until Saturday. They are all the same. And I boasted to you of his strength of character. He is kept at Houlgate by a woman with whom he has been passionately in love for the last two years, a society woman, I suppose. I detest her. Anyhow I am sure I shall detest my daughter-in-law."

"Oh Colette!" I exclaimed.

"Mothers are jealous, too, I fancy."

"That's the misfortune. Bishop Mermillod, of Geneva, told me one day that he was constantly surprised to see good Christian women, of great piety, become the desperate enemies of their daughters-in-law, and lose all sense of justice. I explained to him that it was a sex-jealousy. He was quite struck by this idea, but on reflection he acknowledged that I was right."

"A sex-jealousy! Impossible!"

"Why, no, my poor dear. With a woman, love is only maternity in flower, and maternity love in fruit."

"Then it is Nature that is guilty. Oh I do owe it a grudge then."

I began to laugh.

"You are wrong, for Nature always places the remedy beside the evil. In maternity, for instance, there is abnegation, there is devotion. To wish for the welfare of one's child is an ordinary sentiment; we ought to arrive at wishing for it by means, if need be, of another person. I have such faith in the progress of humanity that I am persuaded there will some day be good mothers-in-law on this world's stage."

"Ah, Antone, how changed you are."

"I hope I am."

"It is not only to give me peace again that God has brought you here. It is so that you may communicate to me a little of the strength and the wisdom that you have acquired."

We were walking, and I took Colette's arm, drew it through mine, and we talked until sunset. I do not know whether I have transmitted to her any strength, as she says, but for my part, I took away with me a deep joy which went straight to the right place. I fancy that something very fine took place on that terrace of the Grand Hôtel of Bagnoles.

*Bagnoles-de-l'Orne.*

Guy returned from Houlgate visibly happy. In his eyes and round his lips there was a beautiful vibrating light; in his voice there were notes of triumph. This caused me an incomprehensible irritation. Under the impulsion of his inward joy he was ridiculously tender to his mother and to me. I had made up my mind to keep him at a distance but this was not easy. The

dominating force that he has inherited from his father nearly always gets the better of my will. He felt my resistance and this urged him on. He has resolved to take possession of me in the name of the family. He does not pay any attention to my coldness, but my abruptness astonishes him, nevertheless, at times. He raises his eyebrows, looks at me intently, and then the irresistible smile reappears on his lips, and I am softened again as by a miracle. The idea occurred to him to call me "god-mother," and Colette, uneasy in her mind, remonstrated with him at once.

"I must call her something, though," he answered gaily. "Cousin is ridiculous, and Madame de Myères too solemn. You would be jealous if I called her mother. Besides, the name really belongs to her, as she was the wife of my god-father."

We could not say anything in reply. The things that are the most difficult for me to endure are the ironies of fate. They always exasperate me. This one is most disagreeable to me. My pen has just stopped, as it does when I am not quite frank with myself. Is it really disagreeable to me?

The day after his return Guy came up to call on me. After a sharp, light knock he entered the room, as though he were at home. The small and rather low-ceilinged sitting-room put in such striking relief the resemblance of his tall figure with that of my husband that I was overcome by it.

"And so here I am at Jean Noël's," he said, laughing, but with some feeling. "Isn't it amusing?"

"Tragically amusing, yes," I thought. He looked round him with curiosity, read the titles of my books, examined my photographs, among which he recognised those of two of my heroines, was amused at my *gris-gris*, threw a kiss to my "Victory of Samothrace," touched

everything like a badly brought-up boy, but with a familiarity in which there was tenderness and respect. And I watched him without saying anything, deeply moved, troubled, protesting inwardly against this something of M. de Myères which was entering my life again.

"One feels all right here," he said, sitting down at my writing-table, "just as one does everywhere where people think and work — I have discovered that."

"A discovery that does you honour," I said, suddenly softened.

"Doesn't it? Oh you see I am not a bad sort."

"I hope not, for your mother's sake."

"Where is my god-father's portrait?" he asked, just as he was going away.

"Somewhere else," I replied, brusquely.

"That's just it. With a woman the portrait she does not show is the only one that counts."

"You know a great deal about women," I said, in a mocking tone.

I was standing up. He put his hands on my shoulders.

"I know enough, god-mother, to be aware that you are the right sort."

These words fell like a drop of oil on my rancour. Several times since they have come back to my ears, causing me a pleasure of which I am ashamed. What subtle art there is in our complexity! Guy confided to me his anxiety about his mother. He loves her passionately and he wants to be reassured all the time as regards the probable result of the operation to which she is doomed. This filial anguish, even in the son of M. de Myères, touches me, and I do my utmost to chase it away. The strange god-son that Providence has given me monopolises me more and more. When he sees me starting on my way to take the waters in

the afternoon, he leaves everything, comes to me and accompanies me there. He goes and fetches my glass of water, sits down beside me, and then brings me back through the forest by the longest road. I often try to escape him, and once he noticed this.

"I believe you want to get rid of me, god-mother," he said, with a reproachful look, "do I bore you?" and out of politeness I had to protest.

The other day when we were walking along he wanted to tell me something and he suddenly put his arm through mine and pressed it firmly. I had a violent pang at my heart and my body recoiled instinctively. This gesture of affection and confidence had been peculiar to my husband. He had walked like this with me miles and miles on the terrace of Chavigny. As I thought of him I suddenly saw his shadow appear at my side, his elegant and distinguished outline lengthen out on the road. His outline? Ah, no, that of his son, but so similar, so cruelly similar. My eyes were rivetted on it with a mixture of love and hate, of happiness and grief. It was poignant and exquisite. Most certainly Jean Noël could never have imagined anything like that.

*Bagnoles-de-l'Orne.*

My first automobile excursion, with Guy as driver! How strange my life is becoming. I was imprudent enough to express before him the desire I had to try the new method of locomotion. This afternoon he came to my rooms with a long cloak over his arm.

"God-mother," he said, in a joyful voice, "I have my friend d'Urville's Panhard and I am going to take you out."

I began by refusing, but he would not accept any of my poor reasons. He then made me put on my hat,

twisted a veil round my head, helped me on with his mother's cloak and before I had time to recognise myself he had installed me in the vehicle. Colette, who was at the door, thanked me by a glance for consenting to let myself be taken off. Guy, in his turn, then got in, put his hand on the guide, and we started. What a surprise this new motion was for my old body. It seemed to me that the motor was in me. Neither driver nor horse in front of us, nothing but space, and we entered freely, triumphantly into that, as though it all belonged to us. It gave me the sensation of an increase of grandeur and power.

"When I looked at this bright, beautiful machine, so well disciplined," I said to my companion, "I realise what progress has been made in so short a time. Eight years ago I was present at one of the first automobile races. There were about twenty cars. They started from the Arc de Triomphe with a wild trepidation, a noise of machinery like the jingling of saucepans, and they left behind them the most offensive smoke. And now here they are almost perfect, hurrying along noiselessly, obeying like living things. It is marvellous!"

"What calculations and figures have had to be worked out on paper in order to arrive at this result," added Guy.

"And where did they come from, all these figures? Ask the engineers whether they know! I like to fancy that the invisible agents of Providence work the human brain in the same way. Under their action its thought becomes stronger, more harmonious, its faculties become flexible, its wavering diminishes, and it is less subject to stoppages, to those terrible stoppages."

Guy began to laugh.

"Stoppages? Well, your brain, god-mother, cannot know those."

"Oh, it does know them. Only too often my mind fumbles along, and that distresses me."

"A little oil in the lubricators, that is all that is wanting, I am sure."

"Which means?"

"Plenty of family affection. The hotel and strangers all the time cannot be very comforting. Now you will have Mother, Uncle Georges and me. When I think that if we had not come to Bagnoles we should, perhaps, never have met each other again in this world."

"Yes, but we were intended to meet each other again."

"You don't regret it, I hope?"

"Oh no," I answered sincerely.

"That's a good thing."

Guy, tempted by the fine road which stretched out before us as far as the eye could see, was not long in increasing the speed of his machine. I closed my eyes. The soft, stimulating air, which we cut through, thoroughly intoxicated me. It seemed to me that I no longer had any body, and this was a most strange sensation. As soon as my driver slackened speed I became conscious again.

"You weren't afraid?" he asked, anxiously.

"I hadn't time to be," I answered.

"We won't tell that we went at thirty-seven an hour."

"No, we won't tell, agreed. I am glad to have had the experience of that fine speed."

Half an hour later, after going through a little town called Forté Macé, we arrived safe and sound at the door of the Grand Hôtel. Guy jumped down, and with a smile, the smile I had loved so much, he held out his hands, and I gave him mine. This was more marvellous still than the Panhards and the Gardner-Serpollets.

*Bagnoles-de-l'Orne.*

It seems as though Providence is bent on thrusting this son of Monsieur de Myères upon me and letting him be part of my life. For what object, I wonder? Ah, Providence has reasons "which reason ignores." In the meantime the strongest instincts of my whole being protest. The combat of which my brain is the theatre is certainly fine and curious to study, but it is painful to experience. My peace, which had been bought so dearly, no longer exists. At every instant the mellow sound of an unforgotten voice makes me start, a glance startles me and rouses sleeping memories. At such times my old heart beats heavily, waves of emotion colour my face, and I am furious. Guy attracts and repels me. It gives me pleasure to see him appear and then, after a few minutes, his presence causes me real distress. I should like to discover in him faults which are antipathetic to me, but he has those which I like and the qualities which I prefer as well. I am ashamed to own it, but I hoped to find in him some trace of degeneration. Well, I am disappointed, for he gives one the impression of perfect balance, of candour and of fresh air. His expression is frank and bright. In his eyes he has not that unsteady look which indicates a passion for gambling. His hand-shake is neither feeble nor ordinary, it is that of a personality. He has the artistic soul and the nervous temperament of his father, but to these have been added some of the elements of force which characterized the Molays, the paternal ancestors of my cousin, the Huguenot ancestors. Nature went to them to find these elements. Is that why Colette —? That idea makes me stagger. I dare not yet look so deeply into life.

As though to please me still more, Guy has a faint tinge of cosmopolitanism. The long voyage that he

took after his military service enlarged his vision. He speaks English and German well. He goes to Scotland for the shooting; he has spent several months of his holidays at Bonn. He knows perfectly well that in England there is more discipline, more real discipline than with us, that in Germany there is a wider love of science, more respect for any superiority. He does not insist with hue and cry, like a blind man, that France is the first of nations, but he knows that it might become the first. He knows its weak points, and the strong points of our neighbours. He has acquired a good basis of judgment. Will he have the will-power to create around him, and to the extent of his influence, the energies necessary to the well-being of his country? Will he have the courage to react against low ambitions and bad faith? I doubt it. It seems to me that he is already affected with egotism, that moral microbe which one finds so frequently among good people, and which paralyses their action. At "Les Rocheilles" he has acquired a taste for the country and for a free life. He is attending the lectures at the Grignon school with the idea of some day being the owner of a large domain. At present he is not troubling much about clearing the land and making canals. He is nothing but a lover. With whom is he in love? Is it a society woman? Is she a widow, a married or divorced woman? Or is she a *demi-mondaine?* On seeing his ardent expression it is evident that it is no young girl's face which is in his mind. Guy loves to talk and I encourage him through curiosity about the modern soul. Poor soul in transition! We judge it severely and do not know its work. It is neither beautiful nor poetical, I grant. Its adolescence has no dreams, its youth no ideal, no enthusiasm, no illusions. There is a gloominess about

it. The ancient faith has disappeared from its horizon, and the new faith has not yet risen. It is not allowed to soar, but is constrained to dive with neither truce nor interval, in order to drag from the depths of Nature the elements and forces necessary for a more intense life, a more rapid evolution. For this prodigious effort the faculties of the brain are strained, and also the muscles of the body. I feel great pity, for I fancy that this thankless labour is preparing for humanity a period of beauty, grandeur and happiness.

*Bagnoles-de-l'Orne.*

If Guy were not so young he would no doubt notice the tension that exists when Colette, he and I are together. I am obliged every instant to turn the conversation into another channel, to avoid dangerous themes. On certain days it is as though evil spirits delight in making the situation intolerable. He takes all his meals with his mother, and in the evening plays cards with her. He has asked me several times to take a hand at whist. I have refused under the pretext that I have my bath at five in the morning, and after dinner I return to my rooms lest he should come and insist on my returning to the drawing-room. He has a very vivid remembrance of his god-father, his "handsome god-father," as he calls him. He began to talk about him with enthusiastic admiration, and in such an affectionate manner that I felt suddenly choked. I did not add a word to his praises. Another time I cut him short in such an abrupt way that he was surprised. He is astonished to see that I am one of those people who dare not look at their dead. The weakness on my part disappoints him, I am sure. My modernism and my cosmopolitanism constantly disconcert him. I evidently

interfere with his conception of what an elderly woman should be. He is above all shocked to see me living at the hotel. A word betrayed his ideas.

"You think that it is wanting in dignity," I said, with a half smile.

"No, but it seems to me that you must feel the need of a home."

"Sometimes it happens that I have a longing for a nice flat, away from the outside world, a maid, an excellent cook, friends, a carriage and pair. And yet I am persuaded that if all that were given to me, before very long I should ask for my room again at the Hôtel de Castiglione. I like being 'on the branch' better than living in an empty nest with my feet doubled up. My sole regret is not to have a nook in the country, not to be able to enjoy either the summer or the autumn. I have a horror of hotel landscapes."

Guy's face lighted up.

"But you will have 'Les Rocheilles' now," he exclaimed; "verdure, trees, flowers to your heart's content. We might arrange the summer-house in the Orangery for you, couldn't we, mother?"

"A good idea," answered Colette, without looking at me.

"Uncle Georges will not be sorry. We can have some bridge and poker there. As soon as mother is convalescent I will come and fetch you. You must spend the autumn with us by way of a trial."

I felt my cousin's anguish magnetically.

"Agreed!" I said gaily.

The poor woman gave a sigh of relief. If ever a word did her any good it was that one, and I am glad that I was able to utter it. Colette and Guy are keenly interested in my literary work. They wanted to know the genesis of my books. I told them with real pleasure.

I know now how much I have missed in having no family, and I understand why success has given me so little joy. Madame d'Hauterive asked me whether I had the manuscript of the novel which is to appear in a Review in December. On my reply in the affirmative, she expressed a wish to read it.

"You see," she added, with a nervous smile, "I might not be there then."

I made fun of that supposition, but I took her my little manuscript books. She stroked them with her pretty pale hand, opened them slowly with respect, and looked at the hand-writing as at an old acquaintance.

"Always firm, always clear, and not at all the old school. It will be the first time I have ever read a novel in manuscript," she said, with childish satisfaction.

The next day, to my great surprise, she arrived in my rooms with the book.

"Finished already!" I exclaimed.

"Oh yes, I could not leave it."

"That's a compliment."

She put her arms round my neck.

"Oh, Antone, it is more beautiful, stronger than the others That happens with real children you know. The last are often the greatest successes. You can be proud of this one. I adore it, and you with it," she added, pressing her cheek to mine.

"Well, sit down there," I said, pointing to the couch, "I am curious to hear the impressions of my first reader, you understand."

She lay down and I arranged the cushions behind her back. Then with an animated expression she spoke to me of the scenes that had pleased her the most, of the ideas that had struck her.

"And my heroine, did you discover her resemblance to anyone?"

Colette blushed.

"To me? I was not flattering myself then?"

"Without intending it, I must own that I have given her your style, a great deal of your character and many of your habits. Did you notice that when she prays she closes her eyes very tightly like you?"

"I no longer close them. What disturbs me is inside now."

"And the pretty way you handle your lorgnette, I have lent her that. You see, there are effects, sensations, gestures which fix themselves in our brains, without our knowing it, to be used for the work that has to be done, for some far-off work, even."

"It is marvellous," murmured Madame d'Hauterive. "And what things you have discovered in a simple love story."

"Not the thousandth part of what it contains probably."

"The hopes that you give seem so true," added Colette.

"Because they come from Life itself. Life is full of precious matters, man has only been able to draw mud and clay from it hitherto, some day he will arrive at its real treasures."

"And when I think that your optimism is born of a great sorrow."

"It is the proof of its logic and of its sincerity."

"No doubt. Antone, you must write these pages with real hope."

"Providence has known how to oblige me to do it."

"And it has made use of me. That idea will always bring me back to pessimism. It is all in vain that I say to myself all the time I have lived out my destiny,

there are moments when I feel guilty. You see, I know exactly where my conscience is placed; it is here below my heart. With me this spot must be bruised, blue with remorse."

I could not help smiling.

Madame d'Hauterive rose to go away. She tapped my manuscript tenderly.

"I am glad to think that when you began this novel you could already consider me without any ill-will."

"Without ill will!" I exclaimed. "Did you not see that I had a special affection for that heroine who resembles you? I did not imagine that our meeting was to be so soon, but at the bottom of my heart I wished for it."

"And I, just think!"

"We did not bring it about. It happened independently of our will. What other proof do you want in order to believe that we are led?"

My cousin put her hand over mine and pressed it firmly.

"May you keep the absolute and triumphant faith which has put forgiveness into your heart!" she said.

God knows that my forgiveness is complete. Colette does not cause me pain like M. de Myères and Guy. I am once more sensitive to her delicate charm. She inspires me with a kind of maternal friendship. That does not mean that we are as near to each other as we were formerly. No, there are, in the depth of our beings, hereditary repugnances which are stronger than reason. At certain moments a thought, a memory, either of hers or of mine, changes the atmosphere, produces a chill; an invisible barrier rises between us, there is a silence and we leave each other saddened and surprised. I have kissed Madame d'Hauterive several times, I have held her in my arms, yet I could neither drink tea, nor play cards with her! We had, from our

childhood liked tea. We took it in our two families because we enjoyed the taste of it, at a time when in France it was still considered as a medicine. It had an exhilarating effect on our brains. We prepared it with jealous care, we did everything we could to bring out its aroma, and we only offered it to those who appreciated it. Monsieur de Myères was one of these people. It was particularly delightful at Chavigny, this five o'clock communion. I can see Colette and myself distinctly, installed in the recess of one of the high windows. On the table between us, lighted up by the rays of the setting sun, the old silver, the singing kettle, the Chinese porcelain of sea-green, the small linen napkins, and the fragrant steam rising from the cups. That little exotic spirit of the tea, which we absorbed slowly, communicated to us an instantaneous feeling of well-being, a slight intoxication. Our conversation became more animated, everything seemed better here below. We called that time "the rose coloured hour." It is all this which could not be reproduced. Madame d'Hauterive feels it as well as I do. The other day the maid brought in the tea-tray while I was there. She sent it away again brusquely, and her delicate eyebrows met in a contraction of pain. Why was this?

As to cards, we used to love them, not after the manner of gamblers, but like living capricious things which were in turn favourable or unfavourable to us, which gave us a sensation of good or bad luck. Without being able in those days to account for it, we were agreeably affected by the electricity that they produced. From our earliest childhood we had played donkey and battle, later on it was bézique, écarté or piquet. Oh, the glorious games we had, I have thought of them more than once. I never played with an adversary as amusing as my cousin. She was incapable of con-

trolling herself, and her behaviour would have scandalised English people. Her exclamations, her looks betrayed her at times, but she played cautiously and well. When she continued losing rather too long a time, she began to invoke her ancestors, all the saints she knew, St. Anthony of Padua, who was just beginning to be in favour, and Joan of Arc. The excitement of the game gave her a pretty colour. My aunt, who did not like seeing us spend hours at the card table, suggested to us one day that we should, at any rate, make "a pool" for the poor. We caught at the idea, which we thought brilliant. It gave new interest to our games, and put a certain harmony into our passion. The sight of the stockings and shirts we saw being made around us no longer caused us any remorse, for we were making the Queen of Spades work for charity. This was not commonplace, and it was very amusing. She supplied warm clothes, filled plenty of lamps with oil, and eased the last days of many old people. I remember that once we took it into our heads to bring about a marriage between two young people of Chavigny; both of them had been children deserted by their parents. They liked each other, and they had "a marrying disposition," as the Cher people say, but they had not sixpence between them with which to go into housekeeping. We started, for their benefit, a memorable "pool." I do not think any other ever gave us so much pleasure. After playing for two or three hours we would cry out triumphantly, "We have won the kitchen utensils." After this it was the household linen and then the bed. When we had arrived at the sum of fifteen pounds we had the banns put up and ordered the violins. Ah, what a happy memory that is. Our protégés are now very comfortably off, and they have two children. The eldest son is apprenticed as a gar-

dener at Vilmorin. Cards, which have destroyed so many homes, created one, anyhow. It is a satisfaction to think that our games of bézique, écarté and piquet have produced something good, life, even, which will be perpetuated long after us. And we can never begin them again, those dear games. The idea of Madame de Myères and Colette d'Hauterive playing at bézique and écarté together! Impossible! The very thought of it makes my imagination rebel. It seems to me ridiculous. What is ridicule? It is a want of harmony that makes people laugh. I do not see any other explanation. All lack of harmony is painful or ugly. The last few days I have been thinking a great deal about Madame Victor Hugo. When the publisher, Lacroix, gave a banquet in honour of the poet's sixtieth anniversary, she authorised her husband to invite his mistress, and she drank a toast herself to her health. Frankly, I feel that I am incapable of arriving at that height. She considered her husband perhaps as a demi-god evidently, whilst for me, Monsieur de Myères was just a man.

*Bagnoles-de-l'Orne.*

Colette leaves Bagnoles to-morrow. At my request, she has prolonged her stay a week. We shall have spent fifteen days together after having kept aloof from each other for fifteen years. When I saw the maid beginning to pack the trunks I had a pang at my heart. Am I not to see her again? She has gained strength at Bagnoles. The pain which makes her have recourse to injections of morphia is less frequent, but she is terribly anæmic. I have never seen such deep circles under any living eyes. It is this which makes me uneasy. The dread of the operation she has to undergo weighs on her mind, and with what a weight I can imagine. Often when she has been making plans she has stopped short and been silent,

as though she had seen the edge of the sword hanging over her head. She has given me a sealed envelope, begging me to open it if she should die. I have used all my eloquence to reassure her, I have invented all the instances of cure I could think of, and I believe I have succeeded in inspiring her with a little hope.

Guy wanted us to dine together this evening at the restaurant and I could not refuse. In order to lessen the tension that she foresaw, Madame d'Hauterive tried to persuade him to invite one of his friends who was staying near Bagnoles.

"Oh no," he answered "only three. It will be nicer and more homelike." More homelike . . . he little thought to what degree! Oh, that dinner, the memory of it, and the suffering, too, will remain with me for a long time. In his ignorance of the torture he was inflicting upon us, Guy had ordered a very dainty meal, and had sent flowers from Ferté-Macé. I had never seen him dressed for dinner. His well-cut smoking jacket and his white shirt-front emphasised his resemblance to Monsieur de Myères in such a pitiless way that my voice was constantly altered by my emotion. He fascinated me, and when I looked at him I felt, instinctively, the embarrassment of Madame d'Hauterive. We scarcely ate anything, but we drank a great deal of champagne. Under its influence Colette's eyes dilated, their circles became more hollow, two red patches, like two flowers of blood, coloured her cheeks. In the shadow thrown by the lampshades this superficial brilliancy showed up all the more, and gave me a painful impression. In spite of our efforts it was difficult to keep up the conversation, and there were cold currents, heavy silences, false notes. Without knowing it Guy himself was affected by all this. Colette, her son, the son of Monsieur de Myères, and I, the wife, gathered round the same table, sharing the bread and

wine, it was too flagrantly inharmonious, and that was why it was so painful. Ah, this want of harmony, is it not the cause of all the evils, of all the ugliness here and elsewhere? The occult struggle, which goes on without truce in the whole universe, is not the unique object of it to create harmony?

*Bagnoles-de-l'Orne.*

Colette has gone — she and her son, of course. The idea that we should, perhaps, never see each other again made our farewell deeply felt and painful. We could not take our eyes from each other and could not loose hands. Guy felt this and tried, by his gaiety, to dissipate our emotion.

"We shall keep an eye on you, god-mother," he said at the last moment. "And above all, don't try to escape from your family."

"I shall not try," I answered. He kissed my hand, sprang into the compartment, took off his hat, and called out, "Good-bye, till we meet at 'Les Rocheilles'!"

And I repeated "'Les Rocheilles.'" The train moved off. It made an immense curve before disappearing. Colette stayed at the window. I saw her white face going farther away and getting smaller, and then a thick cloud of black smoke hid it abruptly from me, and I stood there, seized with a superstitious fear. I had not the courage to return to the hotel, so went for a walk in the forest. I have not felt such a sensation of solitude for years. The situation between Madame d'Hauterive, Guy and myself was false, intolerable at times, but as long as they were there I was once more protected — I belonged to someone. I was glad to say "my cousin," to show that I had relatives like everyone else. As a matter of fact, family gives force and dignity to the individual. Whilst walking along with bent head I lived

over again this last chapter, and life appeared to me more extraordinary, more marvellous than ever. I would have given a great deal to have been able to talk all this over with Sir William Randolph. I wrote to him about my meeting with Madame d'Hauterive, to him, sole confidant. What will he think of it? If I had been told when I left England that a fortnight later I should part from Colette with sorrow, I should not have failed to answer: "Never, impossible!" and yet I do feel sorrow. We should do wisely to efface these two ridiculous adverbs from our vocabulary.

*Bagnoles-de-l'Orne.*

Three days ago I had been thinking a great deal about Simley Hall and Sir William, and he was writing the original letter I have just received, a letter that is very English in tone, very masculine in character; in which all sentiment and feeling are dissimulated by humour and bantering, and in which an involuntary bitterness is perceptible. "In spite of my reluctance," he says, "I am compelled to admit that this meeting with your cousin has all the appearance of having been foreordained, and also the reconciliation which followed it. After that I cannot, without failing in the logic which is your strong point, praise your generosity. And by the same argument I ought to declare the woman murderer, H., who is to be hanged to-morrow at Newgate, innocent. Your belief is desperately perplexing. Anyhow, I can congratulate you on having arrived at a degree of perfection which permits you to forgive so completely, and this I do heartily. Although you have not arrived at making me see life under the same aspect as you see it, do not regret your visit to Simley. You did me a great deal of good. Certain ideas of yours have germinated in my brain and produced something. The action of your Latin soul

upon my rough Saxon soul has not been in vain. You can be proud of that!"

In his last page he adds: "It is useless to hope for anything better for me, in case you were childish enough to do so. Hope rather that courage may be given me. I try to believe with you that the vibrations of joy and sorrow are necessary for alimenting universal life, and that it is indispensable that I should be suffocated, frankly, at that point, I do not succeed. You have done wisely in supplementing your philosophy by sending that picture by Ary Scheffer. I have put it facing my bed, and I blend my hope with that which shines on the face of St. Monica. That is, perhaps, more sure. I fancy that she sees a place where one can breathe well, where the air is oxygenated, divine. Oh, to be able to breathe! That alone at times seems to represent Paradise for me. When Goethe was dying he asked for more light; it is more air for which I shall ask."

While reading these lines my heart filled with affectionate sympathy, and my eyes with tears. Oh no, I do not regret my visit to Simley Hall. Enclosed in her grandfather's letter was an absolutely delightful one from little Lily.

"Dear Madame de Myères," she wrote, "we have just had a great trouble. Rosy, the black nursery cat, who had tea with you, is dead. She would not eat and hid under the beds and under the tables. The day before yesterday Sarah called her, but she did not come, because she was not alive. I have cried a great deal. Frank choked down his tears, boys always do that, isn't it funny? Grandpapa says there is a Paradise for animals, and we believe that Rosy is happy. She was so nice and so obedient. We buried her in the animals' cemetery, and when there are flowers on her grave we shall send you

some. We do not know yet what we shall plant there. We hope you will soon come again to Simley."

There are children for you, real children! God bless them! I shall not fail to send them my condolences for Rosy's death.

*Bagnoles-de-l'Orne.*

Bagnoles has three wonderful things: its air, its water and its forest. The air is neither light nor keen, but soft and pure. Its molecules have the property of making objects seem larger, of bringing them nearer. At night the sky appears remarkably low. Nowhere in Europe have I seen the stars so large and so near to me. In this little northern place, there is the same luminous clearness, the same vibrating atmosphere as in the Maritime-Alps. The mineral water, like that of Gastein, unique in France, is unctuous. It seems like liquefied resinous sap, and it is a beautifying water. I have amused myself with studying its effects. After about twenty minutes in the bath the body takes a peculiar whiteness, it looks bloodless. It is as though the blood were all driven back. The reaction afterwards gives a sensation of warmth, of absolutely delicious well-being. The Andaines Forest, is all around the spring and was probably created by it. It is not imposing, but infinitely calm and beneficent. It has wild nooks in it, the aspect of which causes one an almost sacred terror; there are undergrowths of delicate foliage, interspersed with pink heather, and heights from which the pines, stirred by the wind, emit fragrant and harmonious waves of odour. It attracts and holds you. You walk and walk, and your breathing gets easy. That soul of the trees, which makes a flame in the fire-grates, increases your vitality, and you come away from your communion with it refreshed, physically and morally.

The air, the water, the forest form here a reservoir of forces and of health. We do not yet know how to distribute them nor how to draw them out, that is the misfortune.

In the hands of the Germans or the Swiss, Bagnoles would at present be a watering-place of first rank. For forty years it has vegetated most obscurely. It only had one hotel, a most primitive one, and an insufficient establishment for the waters. The provincial people and the lower middle class who frequent it, have egotistically refrained from proclaiming the virtue of the waters. They have taken their daily baths, I am sure, in constant dread of the place becoming more expensive. The doctors and a member of Parliament, with the best intentions, finally undertook to run it. At their suggestion a company was formed and a magnificent, luxurious and absurd hotel, which cost eighty thousand pounds, was built opposite the station, on the unique lake. After this first impetus, avenues were traced out in the heart of the forest. Villas and cottages sprang up as though by magic, but on land that had not been prepared, that is before all the canalisations necessary for health had been made, so that the water from the houses forms, here and there, whitish streams coloured with grease which smell badly. These streams run down as they can to the lake, which they pollute, and which would pollute all the country round if the air were not absolutely antiseptic. A peasant woman, with whom I walked a little way the other day, assured me that before the war disease was unknown in the neighbourhood, and that people only died there of old age. Bagnoles is still classed among the insignificant places, but it has a future. Avarice, selfishness, the want of organisation and practical common sense, politics, even, have impeded its prosperity, as they impede our progress and all our work, perhaps with

a purpose. There are nations which require to be urged on, and others which need to be held back. Who knows if we are not one of the latter? A rather curious fact is the hostility which the building of the Grand Hôtel provoked among all the peasants of the district. With their conservative mind, perhaps, they liked the old Bathing Establishment; or did this revelation of modern luxury offend them? They could not tell themselves, very likely, but from the very first minute they detested it, and they watched it being built with increasing distrust. They come in groups and stand before the gateway, look at it with open mouths and astonished eyes, and then turn silently on their heels. Some of them make bold to go up the flight of stone steps, to cross the hall and reading room, and go down again by the terrace steps. *La Grande Hôtel*, as they persist in calling it, has not exhausted their curiosity. It is an object of pilgrimage for all the weddings, and the richer ones take refreshments there. Last Sunday I witnessed, in the dining-room, a little scene very characteristic of our epoch. A farmer, a man of seventy at least, wearing a long blue blouse and well washed shirt, had been freshly shaven, and arrived to dinner with his son and daughter-in-law. They were shown to a table near mine, and they took their seats. The father, with the dignity natural to the head of a family and the assurance of the one who pays, remarked to the waiter, pushing aside the menu that was offered to him: "Give us everything you have." He did not appear to be at all impressed by the fine ladies and gentlemen in the midst of whom he found himself. His children were more intimidated than he was. The woman, in spite of her fine black silk dress and her flower-trimmed hat, which by-the-bye, made her look considerably uglier, appeared uncomfortable. She felt, by feminine intuition, that she was "not in it." To be in it

or not to be in it means so much. I did not lose sight of the old Norman. He ate all the dishes with visible enjoyment, smacked his tongue over the Saint-Julien and to complete the little festivity ordered coffee and liqueurs. I watched him when the bill came and he was certainly very *chic*. He put on his spectacles and looked at the total. The total, which would probably have given his father an apoplectic fit, did not cause him any surprise. He brought out a big purse, paid without flinching, and then, crossing his hands on his cudgel, looked round him with an expression of pride in his little sly eyes and a joking smile that said plainly: "We've got money too." He had, certainly, and no doubt the good fellow, standing there in that dining-room full of middle class folk, had a sweet illusion of equality if not of fraternity.

*Bagnoles-de-l'Orne.*

I have received two telegrams from Guy and this morning the first letter from Madame d'Hauterive. The sight of the latter caused me deep emotion that was very sweet. On touching it I felt that particular fluid which is evolved by the thoughts of those with whom Nature has linked us. Linked! Science will some day reveal to us the meaning of those beautiful words which we still utter like children. Colette had arrived at "Les Rocheilles" without too much fatigue, after resting two days and a night at Paris. She had wanted to put up at the Hôtel Castiglione, and this is what she wrote me on the subject —

"I asked for your room, and fortunately, it happened to be free. I entered it with an almost religious feeling. The smallness of its dimensions gave me a pang at my heart. How could you have lived there and only there, you who always needed space and never thought rooms

were large and high enough? I asked to have the table on which Madame de Myères wrote. The maid answered stiffly: 'We don't give it to other people.' I could have kissed her for this, and I then explained to her that I was a relative, and that I wanted to see how you were installed there. The good woman's face brightened with comprehension and she quickly lent herself to my fancy. From my bed my eyes rested for a long time on that table, where your novels were born, where all those ideas, all those sentiments which were to stir my soul were developed. I listened to the ticking of the old clock which marked your hours of work. And neither this table nor this clock are yours even. Oh, Antone, I cannot endure that. I do not know whether your room possesses a particular charm, but it was good to be there — oh, so good, that I should have liked to have been able to stay until the end of the week. I visited the house, and I had your table pointed out to me in the dining-room. We lunched at it, Guy and I. Yes, everything is elegant and comfortable, as you said, but that hotel coldness — how could you get used to it? How is it that it did not freeze your very soul? "

Dear Colette! I am glad that she has slept in my room. It seemed small to her. Yes, it is small. What does it matter, though I know now, with the poet, " The space one needs in which to love, to live and to die." The hotel freeze my soul! Oh no, I found rest there, the models whom I needed, all that was necessary for the work assigned to me by Providence. Farther on Madame d'Hauterive said —

" The doctor was amazed at the effect of the waters. When I saw him again I nearly fell on his neck, by way of thanking him for having indicated Bagnoles to me. I still have these youthful impulses — in imagination. The dear man! He little thought, though — the phrase

I was going to write has stopped my pen. No — he little thought. Without his knowing it, his prescription was destined to make us meet again. It was the best prescription he ever wrote. And what about you? Was it not the manager and his wife who brought you to the Grand Hôtel? They were the secret and unconscious agents of our meeting. Oh, Antone, you are right; life is greater, more magnificent than we imagine. You shall teach me to look at it. You shall be my professor for the study of life; will you? When we were young we dreamed our dreams together, now we are old we will philosopsise. All the people in the country round are delighted to see me walk. The hope that I read on their faces has entered into me. It has dissipated my gloomy presentiments, and even my fear. For years I have not felt so well in mind and body. Let us know whether Bagnoles has not some patron saint to whom I can send an offering. Uncle Georges was very happy about our reconciliation. He shook hands with me several times while looking into my eyes in a way that rather disturbed me. Can he have suspected? . . . No matter now. The transformation of Madame de Myères into a novelist stupefied him. He is now reading your books again. He will write to you to congratulate you. We talk of you every day. It gives me a childish pleasure to utter your name aloud. It puts some joy into the atmosphere of 'Les Rocheilles.' And it is good to be writing to you from here. Don't loose my hand again, Antone. But I am quite easy about that, for if *you* were tempted to do so, Jean Noël would know how to prevent it. Jean Noël is the better part, the essence of Madame de Myères. God bless you both."

Loose her hand! No, certainly not. When certain thoughts make its contact painful to me I will clasp it firmly — and my rebellious flesh will get accustomed to it.

Poor little pale hand! I have only one dread now, and that is that it may be taken brutally away from me.

*Bagnoles-de-l'Orne.*

Life at Bagnoles suits me and delights me infinitely. It is not so amusing as that of Aix-les-Bains, but it has a something that is better. I fancy that I am the only one to appreciate this something better. I take my bath at five in the morning. I wake up easily and feel quite gay. It amuses me to go downstairs through the sleeping hotel. An omnibus takes us to the Establishment. It contains six persons, who all arrive more or less crabby. Ah, we are not nice-looking, seen thus, just out of bed and in the fresh light of dawn. The drive is too short, only a few minutes. The beauty of the morning, which I so rarely see, causes me a physical enjoyment. I want to breathe it in, to fill my lungs and my eyes with it. The beauty of night, on the contrary, touches my soul. Here the dawn is remarkably luminous. In its distilled atmosphere, the forest, the peaks of which are scarcely lighted up by the sun, seems still more gloomy and mysterious. The little motionless lake, with its dark, clear shadows, looks like a mirror showing an abyss. The houses and the road are of pinky white. The sleeping landscape gives one the impression of something unreal. And this morning bloom, different each day, delights me. It has the brief duration of all exquisite things. When I pass by again an hour later it has disappeared. After the bath and the douche, the omnibus takes me back to the hotel, where I find my room full of sunshine. My tea is then brought to me, I take it with my usual enjoyment, and after that I lie down on my couch and, as a result of the mysterious process of reaction, I fall into a refreshing sleep. At half past eight I am at my writing-table, where I spend the rest of my morning. After luncheon

I allow myself a little chat or a game of bridge. I then return to my rooms to read the papers and write letters. Towards four o'clock I go for my glass of water, and then set off in one direction or another, not with a light step, alas! When in Paris I scarcely exercise my locomotive muscles, so that when I arrive in the country, or at a watering-place, I am obliged to train myself to walking. It is so true that we can obtain a great deal from our body, even when it is old, that after a few days I can take good walks. Very few people go to the casino. We have fairly good music at the hotel, and we spend the evenings scattered about in the drawing-rooms and hall or on the terrace. The scene is pleasant to look at and the place well lighted. The guests are more or less elegant, and one might imagine one's self staying at a country house with the hosts absent.

For the first time since I was put "on the branch" I find myself in entirely French surroundings and, to my horror and sorrow, I recognise that I am out of my element in it. When I talk to these people of my own race I shock prejudices which I had forgotten, I offend old ideas, and, in the falling back on myself to which I am accustomed, I see plainly their defects and their qualities, I feel the wall at once. To feel the wall between those one loves, one's own people, is terribly painful. The foreigners I have met in the course of my peregrinations, people frequently in an influential position, have welcomed me, received me and invited me. My compatriots, on the contrary, have treated me with a certain reserve. The nomadic and cosmopolitan woman I now am does not inspire them with much confidence. They particularly disapprove of my way of living. The other day, in the midst of a conversation, the theme of which was domestics, my neighbour turned to me —

" As you have no house, this cannot interest you," she said, with a disdainful smile.

A provincial woman then added, with an expressive click of her knitting-needles —

" One ought to have one's house, parish and charities."

I at once felt annihilated, for I do not possess any of these things which constitute social respectability. I do not even pay taxes now. I took care not to confess it, but must own that this rather humiliates me. My civic pride obliges me to give, indirectly, every year the amount which I think that I owe to the community. Should I like to be connected once more with the world? Frankly, I must say that I should not. This is an example of contentment with one's station in life. I only hope it is given to all creatures as it is to me.

*Bagnoles-de-l'Orne.*

The Grand Hôtel is crowded. I have, before my eyes, gathered together, as though for psychological study, specimens of the aristocracy and of upper and lower middle classes, the three upper layers of society. It really is as though individuals had been arranged in layers, like the geological ground. As a matter of fact, they all have a share of common elements, but these elements, worked and mixed differently, make them inconceivably varied. Nature has not yet arrived at the amalgamation which will give fraternity; far from it. These French people who have been gathered under the same roof by similar ills, who ask for health from the same spring, who meet twenty times a day, do not know each other and do not mix with each other. Although they do not wear on their breast the sacred badge of their caste, like the Hindoos, it is visible in their education, in their persons, in their whole bearing, and it separates

them implacably. There is envy felt by them, and there are hereditary rancours. I observe these groups, which are so profoundly distinct, with curiosity. The aristocratic clan takes meals at the restaurant and passes the evenings in the corridors or in the hall. If some members should enter the drawing-room to look at the newspapers, they never stay long; they are driven away by the nervous irritation that hostile surroundings always cause. In this clan everyone is well bred. In spite of crutches and canes, the men take off their hats as they pass through the reading-room, whilst the "Papa's sons," of *bourgeois* race, would never think of raising it if they had four hands free. The *bourgeois* clan is certainly less refined, but it has superior force and more vitality. Thanks to automobiles, we have a large number of masculine visitors, journalists, members of Parliament, manufacturers. The forthcoming elections excite them. I hear political discussions every day. Like those of the Chamber, they give me the painful, humiliating impression that France has become a kind of safe, from which each person may take, but which no one thinks of filling up again. And it is not for France that people are working, but either for the Republic, the Monarchy, or the Empire. Under the influence of these petty ambitions France can only lose all that was imposing about it and become *bourgeois*. Foreigners ask me the meaning of this word *bourgeois* that we generally fling out with a marked accent of disdain. I am always puzzled to explain it to them. The dictionary says it means "common," "undistinguished." It is not quite that, though. *Bourgeoisism*, like *provincialism*, is a mentality. To be it represents a fruit-stone without pulp, and it evidently belongs to the *pot-au-feu* cell. It is one of the props of society, and mere props are never either beautiful or graceful. Without it I do not know how the world would keep its equilibrium, and

with it, alone, I do not know either how it would progress. It gives to individuals a shell-like impenetrability. One finds certain characteristics of it in people who have received a good education, who have superior culture, and with whom taste and a sense of beauty are developed. It betrays itself by petty ideas, hopeless intolerance, blind obstinacy, and especially by an incapacity to understand liberty and to give it generously. This mentality creates a particular atmosphere that is immediately felt. The peasant, the workman and the artist are not *bourgeois*. I could mention a king who is more so than people born in the Rue du Sentier. Napoleon I. was *bourgeois*, Napoleon II. was not. Balzac, Guy de Maupassant were not *bourgeois*, but Zola was. Two of our important newspapers and one of our best reviews are *bourgeois*. The church of St. Augustine is *bourgeois*, St. Roch is not. The *Comédie Française*, the *Opéra Comique* the *Palais-Royal*, are all *bourgeois*: the *Vaudeville* the *Variétés*, the *Théâtre Antoine*, the *cafés-concerts* of Montmartre are not. The tea-rooms are all *bourgeois*, except one. England, Italy, Spain are not *bourgeois*, Germany is, but its Emperor is not. France is in danger of becoming so, and it is that which distresses me. France *bourgeois!* — Heaven forbid!

From what I see and hear at this place I realise the difficulty that foreigners have in understanding us. They cannot understand that difference of character, which is the individual nature, and that difference of soul, which is the essence of the race. The French themselves are not chary of saying, "We have a difficult character." That is true, but we have a noble and wonderful soul. I feel this all around me. At certain moments this soul shines out on all faces, it bursts out in generous words, it clears the atmosphere laden with rancour, with political passions. It is in this that my hope of good and

of improvement lies. The feminine element is well represented at the Grand Hôtel of Bagnoles. I study it curiously, and am surprised to see that it has remained almost stationary. As in my time, I see girls who dream and grandmothers telling their beads or grumbling. Sentiment, sentimentality, all that is feminine, the ordinary charity, and nothing else as yet. Not a single aspiration towards a wider life, not a sign of individuality. In these surroundings I am almost ashamed of my modernism. Accustomed as I am to the frank ways of the Englishwoman, to the open mind of the American woman, the French girl, is to me an anachronism. She gives me the impression of a plant which has never had enough air and water, and which has difficulty in breathing. Slow and languid, she does not feel the mere joy of living, the need of action. She tries sports, in order to sacrifice to fashion, but her body, badly trained for it, protests. The knowledge with which her brain has been crammed, does not make ideas germinate there, and does not give her the desire to know still more. She seems to me tired, satiated, artificial already. I should like to take her into the forest, to the mountain or to the sea-side in order to put her in direct contact with all the divine forces of Nature. I should like, too, to take her on a pilgrimage to Italy, to Spain, and through France, so that she might know the treasures of beauty which are our inheritance. When I watch her, her needle plying backwards and forwards through a piece of silk or canvas, I long to shake her. I know what she is dreaming about. Without being aware of it herself, she is already subjected to the possession of man. Her thoughts wander towards the mystery that she suspects, disturbing images are formed in her mind, and the warm breath of instinct tarnishes the first bloom of her being. Mothers ought to remember. Mothers! They

think of nothing but of guarding their daughters, of giving them a liberal dowry and of arranging a rich marriage for them. They spoil their sons in the hope of attaching them to themselves, and of thus winning them from their future rival, the daughter-in-law. This is maternity as practised still with us in the twentieth century.

The other day I was imprudent enough to express the desire of seeing the French girl come out of her groove, take part in life and bring into it the fresh forces of her heart and mind.

"It is her emancipation that you would like, then?" said a fond mother with a scandalised air.

"Yes, but not before she has been prepared for it by education, and, above all things, not before mothers have educated their sons to have an absolute respect for woman, and changed the wolves into shepherds."

"Wolves into shepherds!" exclaimed a pretty Parisian woman. "And what about instinct — and Nature?"

"American women have discovered the secret of disciplining them. They are the only women who love their own sex."

"Then they are not women," answered my interlocutor briefly.

"And then France is not America!" declared an old lady in a cutting tone.

That fact clinched me. I felt the wall again and I was silent. I will venture to say that the Japanese woman will have accomplished her evolution before the Latin woman.

*Bagnoles-de-l'Orne.*

Bagnoles is not *bourgeois*. From a picturesque point of view I ought not to regret that it should be in the practical hands of my compatriots, and I am delighted

to see its heights crowned by *châteaux* instead of by vulgar inns. Nature employs the English, the Swiss and the Germans for its works of public utility, but it gives to the Latins its choice hunting-grounds, the places of beauty that it wishes to keep as they are here below. With the exception of three rather long excursions that I am keeping for October, I have explored the environs on foot or driving, and in this small place, situated on the borders of Maine, Normandy and Brittany. I have felt distinctly the force of the North, the obscure and religious thought of the West, and the gay mildness of the Centre of France. Its forest, its strange rocks, its Druidic stones, its good fairy, Andaine, its evil fairy, Gione, its saints, its heroic legends, its massive *châteaux* lend to it an undeniable dignity, an intense charm. At times it seems as though there is a soul in the wind which caresses you. Several times its contact has startled me. The country round, too, gives an impression of richness, of fecundity. I am no longer surprised that the peasants are able to treat themselves to luncheon at the Grand Hôtel.

To-day I took a road, running parallel with the railway, for the first time. I had disdained it on account of this proximity, and it gave me a very interesting afternoon. It skirts the forest, passes at the back of the race-course and, with a very gradual ascent, goes up above the valley. After walking for a quarter of an hour I came across some trees, on the branches of which were little stones. I thought it must be some child's game, but there were more and more of them and I stopped short, amazed, when I came to a spot where all the trees were laden with them. The effect of these pebbles up in the air amongst the foliage was fantastic, and I understood that it meant something more than

play. I asked an old peasant woman why they were there.

"They are St. Ortaire's stones," she answered; "a very good saint who cures the 'rheumatics.' He has his chapel five minutes from here. People make pilgrimages to it and, on coming down again, every person places a stone just as high as his own suffering is. I have put one for my knees. Would Madame like to see it?"

"Certainly," I answered, very much interested. I followed the good woman, and she pointed out a pebble in the first forked branch of a beech.

"There it is," she said, with a complacent air. "The men say that it's all nonsense. Now-a-days they've no more faith than the animals. Anyhow, my 'rheumatics' have gone, and I walk without a stick."

I looked round and saw that there were pebbles as low as the ground, the mark of painful feet, no doubt; others were placed as high as the knees, the shoulders, the forehead. I was astonished that they should stay where they were put, and that no one had been tempted to disturb them. The peasant woman lifted her chin.

"No danger," she exclaimed, "anyone who touches them would get the disease of those who put them there. They know that — all the bad boys, fortunately."

The sight of these strange *ex-votos* hypnotised me for a few minutes. Each one represented human suffering and hope, and there were hundreds of them. I would not for anything in the world have laid hands on one; not because of any fear of punishment, but out of mere respect. I was curious now to make the acquaintance of St. Ortaire. I continued my way until I arrived at the little hamlet bearing his name. It is right at the top, admirably situated. I first came to two houses of the *bourgeois* type. On the ground-floor

of the nearest a placard attracted my attention and, to my surprise, I saw a list of works of abstruse philosophy mentioned upon it, with the following words at the foot: "Apply to the author at the villa opposite." The idea of this puff, placed behind the window of a room full of potatoes, seemed to me delightfully naïve. I made inquiries and was told that the author was a priest. His dwelling, in the warm sunshine, on the borders of the forest, made me think of Jocelyn. I rang the bell there, intending to get his works. He was absent, so that I decided to come again. St. Ortaire is only a group of about half a dozen houses, in the midst of which the rubbish heap ferments and the liquid manure runs. There is not a single climbing plant, not an attempt at beautifying the place. In England all the cottages would have had flowers. I could not help regretting that the good priest who lives there should not attend to hygiene rather than philosophy. I asked a woman, who had just been milking, for a cup of milk, and I went into her kitchen, which was large and which also served as a bedroom, for I noticed a bed in it. The table was covered with vegetable parings, the unwashed crockery was on the sink, and the brick floor had not been swept. The flour bowl in which she gave me the milk seemed to be clean, though, and when she opened her large Norman wardrobe, to get change for my two-franc piece I saw piles of very white linen, arranged in the most orderly way. Her housekeeping pride was, no doubt, in that. Two little boys came running in, each with a piece of bread-and-butter in his hand. One of them seized a pitcher of cider, drank from it and then gave it to his brother.

"You let those little ones drink cider like that?" I said, horrified. "Why not give them milk?"

" Because the milk sells better; we never have enough."

I spoke to her of the danger of letting children take fermented drinks, but she only shrugged her shoulders.

" Those are all doctor's stories," she said, with a disdainful accent. " They know nothing at all about it."

I thought it was useless to add another word on the subject. I asked her whether in the winter the people of the village met together in the evenings.

" Oh no," she answered, " everyone stays at home and like that there is no quarreling. Besides there are only three families belonging here; the others are all workmen and Italians, and so we don't have anything to do with them! "

There was a sample of " our difficult character."

On leaving my typical Norman woman, I went in the direction of the little chapel. With its façade covered by an enormous rose-tree, and its rustic steeple, it relieves the surrounding ugliness by a little poetry. Quite small and gloomy, it is inhabited by St. Radegonde and St. Ortaire, whose polychrome statues are, as usual, little honour to religious art. I sat down in front of the altar, and was soon penetrated by that atmosphere peculiar to Catholic churches, which makes all images, impressions and sentiments so curiously keen. My distress about Madame d'Hauterive was painfully intensified. The date of the terrible trial was approaching. With each of the letters, so full of hope I had a fresh pang at my heart. " My little Colette." This expression of olden days escaped my lips and there was an echo of it in the silence of the sanctuary. " My little Colette," and, unconsciously, my eyes looked up in prayer to the placid face of the healing saint. If I had returned to Bagnoles by the road I should, perhaps, have put a stone for him on the trees, but I took a zig-zag path through the forest. The sun, which

was already low, touched the foot of the trees obliquely and threw golden rings into the foliage. The tall ferns, which the breeze did not stir, made an impression on me by their very stillness. In spite of myself I quickened my steps, and was honestly glad when I found myself once more on the open road opposite the station and the Grand Hôtel.

*Bagnoles-de-l'Orne.*

"Operation, admirable success. Mother as well as possible. So glad — Could kiss everybody."

This is the telegram I have just received from Guy. It caused me unmixed joy — unmixed. I am glad to repeat it, for it is the truth — God be praised!

*Bagnoles-de-l'Orne.*

I knew it — Oh, I knew it! She was not to live — she could not live. She had to disappear, and I felt this vaguely. Two telegrams from Uncle Georges arrived forty-eight hours after Guy's. The first said: "Peritonitis. Colette very ill." The second: "Taken from us within a few hours." This news caused me the same pain as a violent blow; it was as though something had snapped. Yes, it had been really renewed again, the bond between us, and more firmly than I had thought. I felt an irresistible need of seeing her again, of accompanying her along that last piece of her road here below. I at once began to pack my trunk. It seemed to me as though I were doing something for her.

Everything is now ready. I start for "Les Rocheilles" to-morrow by the first train. I immediately thought of that letter which she had given me on leaving. I took it out of my pocket-book with deep emotion. I

do not know anything so pathetic as the handwriting of a dead person. The handwriting! The form of the person's thought, intangible, but always living — immortal too. I did not dare open this envelope, which bore the name of Jean Noël — I guessed the request that it contained.

I was right; it was just that. She asks me to watch over Guy, to be his friend, his adviser, to get him out of the hands of the woman who holds him — to find a wife for him! After reading it I exclaimed aloud —

"No, no, I cannot; it is impossible." Out of Madame de Myères and Jean Noël there is not material to make a really superior being, a being capable of this supreme effort. Poor Colette! She little thought how much I loved her, and how I hate my husband's son. She little imagined all that so complex a sentiment could produce. She finishes by telling me that she shall go away with the consolation of having placed Guy under good influence, and knowing that he has a better friend than his mother. Oh God, where am I to get the strength necessary for carrying out the wishes of a dying woman!

## VII

### PARIS

*Hotel de Castiglione, Paris.*

Ah, it has turned quickly for me, the "Wheel of Things," since my departure from Paris at the end of July. This acceleration of movement has stirred me to the very depths of my being. It is now more than a fortnight since I left "Les Rocheilles" and my soul is still vibrating with grief and emotion. "Les Rocheilles!" The home that was formerly so dear to me, so hospitable and so gay. I entered it again after fifteen years of estrangement in the double silence of death and night. Uncle Georges came to the station for me. The way in which he welcomed me, the accent with which he said to me: "I am glad you have come, she is waiting for you," made me imagine that he had suspected the cause of our rupture. During the drive I heard the details of the catastrophe. The operation had been very satisfactory and then, as so often happens, a mere nothing, something impossible to have foreseen, brought on peritonitis. She did not feel that she was dying. She was taken off in a fit of pain, and she was now "waiting for me," to use the expression of M. d'Hauterive. Guy would not have her put in the coffin until I arrived. I found her still on her bed and he was watching beside her. Suffering had aged the young man's face, accentuated in such a way the resemblance, that I started back involuntarily. On seeing

me again he could not utter a word. His tearful affectionate eyes looked from his mother to me with such a pathetic expression that my heart was full of pity. I had stopped in Paris to get some white carnations and roses, Colette's favourite flowers. I placed them tenderly on her breast and on her feet and then, turning to Guy, I said: "Let me finish the night with her. We still have so many things to say to each other." He bent his head in answer, raised my hand to his lips, and then went away. We remained alone together, the dead woman and I. With her dress of ivory white satin, the hood of fine lace drawn over her hair, she looked as though she were ready for some fête. The delicate oval of her face, the long black eyelashes lowered, the arched curves of the mouth, gave her an expression of feminine frailty. This was a revelation, a supreme excuse. Seized with remorse at the remembrance of my hardness I bent over her, kissed her forehead, her pretty hand and knelt down, repeating aloud: "My dear little Colette! My dear little Colette!" At this moment it appeared to me that something stirred the atmosphere around me, that a circular wave enveloped me. Was it the wind coming in through the open window? I do not know, but for the second time in my existence I had the distinct sensation of an immaterial presence, and I shuddered. I looked eagerly at the motionless face of Madame d'Hauterive. It was motionless, but not rigid. There was a living gentleness on it, an expression of peace, which was certainly the last ray from her soul. And it was good to say to myself that she was, perhaps, still there. Death! Only the end of a chapter. The romance, I am sure, will continue through eternity and it will get more full of love, beauty and light.

At break of day she was placed in the coffin, "my

little Colette, and towards eleven o'clock we took her to the cemetery here, where the dead have an ideal resting-place. Provincial funerals, the rites of which I have forgotten, have a veritable grandeur in their simplicity. Owners of the *châteaux* in the environs, and middle-class people, peasants, poor folks had all come from miles round to accompany the Baroness d'Hauterive to her last home. From my window I could see carriages, carts, people in mourning and with the white head-gear peculiar to that part of the world, arriving along the roads. The village church was too small to hold everyone. The doors were left open, and the crowd, massed in the square, could thus follow the service. The cemetery dominates the whole valley, its white walls, its black yews rising up on the top of a hill planted with vines. It is reached by a rather steep path, broken by steps at intervals, and the bodies are carried on the men's shoulders. Behind the family, represented by Uncle Georges, his sister and me, the long procession followed, absolutely quiet and serious. It almost entirely filled the immense "field of the dead." There was not a word, not a whisper, all heads were uncovered or bent. There were tears, prayers for the dead, an exteriorisation of sympathy and of regret most sweet to see and to feel. The final benediction was pronounced amidst silence so profound, that from the neighbouring bush, a little bird ventured to give responses, and its pure, clear song rose like a prayer. In this separation, an ordeal which is forced upon us, there is a certain moment of infinite pain: it is when we are obliged to leave our dead in the dark grave, in the solitude of the cemetery. As though the fleshly bonds were not quite broken, our dear one holds us, calls us back, and we cannot help feeling a kind of remorse

when we return alone to the warm, living house. I felt all that for Colette.

According to the custom, after the funeral ceremony, a meal, composed of very simple dishes, was served to all who had come from a distance, rich and poor alike. This love feast is like a symbol of fraternity in sorrow. There is something good about the provinces. In the important circumstances of life they are better than Paris. One feels that there is more reality, more depth of feeling. Several people recognised me and appeared surprised at my presence, and I was pained and rather embarrassed at this.

When all was over at "Les Rocheilles" Guy accompanied me to my rooms. During this cruel day he had put a brave face on. His grief had only betrayed itself by the extreme rigidity of his expression and the hoarseness of his voice. As my little friend Lily would have said, "he had choked down his tears," and many tears, too. As soon as we were alone, his heroism appeared to leave him. He threw his arms round my neck and I longed to console him. My heart was full of tenderness and of affectionate words, and yet I remained inert, mute, stiffening myself with all the evil forces of my being.

"God-mother, oh, god-mother," he repeated, leaning against me like a baby.

"Poor boy," I murmured, touched finally by his child-like lament, by his accent of distress.

His arms were still round me and I freed myself gently and laid my hand on his shoulder.

"If ever you need a friend," I said, "you will come straight to me, won't you?"

Guy looked at me with an expression in which astonishment and reproach were mingled.

"I need one now, god-mother," he answered. "I shall always need one. Men who have had a mother like mine know the value of a woman's heart. They can never afterwards do without it."

Then, drawing himself up with a fresh effort of courage, he tried to smile.

"I am selfish," he observed. "You must be worn out with fatigue. I will let you rest."

He glanced round the room to see that everything was there for my comfort. He then drew the couch up to the hearth where a wood fire had been lighted and arranged the cushions on it.

"Lie down here," he said, "I will send your tea up." He then added: "Thank you for coming. I am so glad to have you with us."

With these words he went away, his tread instinctively muffled. I remained standing in the middle of the room, ashamed of my coldness. Poor boy! These words came to my lips and they were all I had found to say by way of consolation to Colette's son. Yes, but to the son of my husband, too.

I stayed three days at "Les Rocheilles." It seemed to me that I owed it to my cousin not to leave her dwelling immediately, for she is still so living there. I made the acquaintance again of Robert, her eldest son. I had seen him last at the age of fifteen, and I find him now a man of thirty. Of medium height, very dark, distinguished-looking, and with plenty of muscle, he has all the characteristics of one of our best races, and I felt a curious pleasure in seeing that he was quite a d'Hauterive. He is engaged to a very rich and pretty heiress in the neighbourhood. His intention is to leave the army and to take his place in the country. Uncle George feels the loss of his sister-in-law very keenly. He had lived under the charm of her pleasant

disposition and kindliness. He understood her so well that he excused everything always. Without making any allusion to our estrangement, he has shown me several times over his joy at seeing me again. We conversed together as though we had only left each other the day before. I have never missed reading the delightful article, entitled "Life in the country," which he writes every week in an important evening paper. It is by him that I have always been kept informed of the return of the swallows and the migratory birds. His appreciation of my novels gave me real satisfaction. Mademoiselle Marthe d'Hauterive, his sister, a very original old spinster whom we used to call "the Canoness," did not fail to show her surprise at my reappearance on the scene. She has even tried to draw me into a confession about my rupture with my cousin. Then, too, as she is one of those persons who feel it necessary to let you know their way of thinking, she told me that she disapproved of family quarrels. More than this she owed to me that she had never understood my way of living after the death of my husband. Happy Canoness! There are many things that she will not have understood in this world. She is an excellent creature, though, and very devoted to her own family. I fancy she will stay at the "Les Rocheilles" until her nephew brings the new mistress there. I wanted to see something of Colette's work, the work commenced a year after Guy's birth, twenty-four years ago. I was amazed at what one woman had been able to do. The village of C—, a village which counts three hundred inhabitants, had been entirely reconstructed. Everything has been introduced which is necessary for facilitating cleanliness and hygiene. The race, whose sickly ugliness we had so frequently deplored, has improved in the most inconceivable manner. The complexions of

the people are clear, their eyes bright, their limbs straight, tuberculosis has become rare. A score of foundling children, placed in the most trustworthy families by Madame d'Hauterive, have grown up under her patronage. Uncle Georges has built, at his own expense, a room for meetings, the attractions of which compete triumphantly with the public-house. By means of lectures and discussions, he has succeeded in bringing the masses into the way of progress. He and Madame d'Hauterive have awakened in the peasants around a love of their own kind, pride of their own race. Hitherto they had only been proud of their animals, they are beginning to be so of their children. A woman said to me, lifting up her head as she spoke, "Oh, we have some handsome men now, when the review takes place." This fresh sentiment delighted me. I consider it an immense step forward. And all that represents "Colette's expiation." And so, without knowing it, I have participated in this work of civilisation. A little of my sorrow has entered into the higher morality, which I have found here. Have I the right to regret my sorrow? Should I like to see the wretched-looking faces of unhealthy baby-children again such as those I remember? To this question which I asked myself I was able to answer, "No, a thousand times no," and, before leaving, I went up to the cemetery with this "No" in my mind and heart. I repeated it very quietly to Colette and I took with me from "Les Rocheilles" the conviction that, as Maeterlinck says, "Evil is the good that we do not understand."

*Paris.*

I might have stopped at Touraine and spent the whole month of October there, but I felt the need of being alone, and so I returned to Paris.

It was very sweet to me to think that Colette had inhabited my room for a few hours. The maid who had waited upon her remembered the lady with the beautiful black eyes, and, when I told her of her death an expression of sorrow came into her face which touched me. Guy gave me a photograph of his mother taken last year. There is in her whole person an undeniable nobility, which revealed to me, better than words, the work of grief. I have put this portrait facing my bed. Should I ever have imagined that it would one day be there? It attracts my eyes every minute. Between it and me I feel a sort of current of warmth and life, and I find myself repeating aloud, "Dear little Colette!" To be just, I think I ought to say, "Great Colette!"

As soon as I was back I wrote to Sir William Randolph. He expressed his sympathy in those manly, simple phrases which are so characteristic of him, and which are so sincere. He spoke of the Lussons afterwards. "I had no difficulty," he said, "in inspiring them with the wish to make your acquaintance, for they have read your novels and are among your admirers. They declare that they are delighted to be allowed to call on you." Then, with his lively banter he adds: "I did not guarantee that Madame de Myères was exactly like Jean Noël but I told them that she was nice, very nice. From them, as well as from you, I shall now expect thanks." Sir William insists on providing me with friends. My comparative solitude grieves him. He thinks that these people, my own country-people, will be nearer to me than foreigners. What kindliness there is in this thought. I lend myself to his whim with a mixture of dread and curiosity. I wonder what will be the result of this acquaintanceship, about which he is so keen.

*Paris.*

I had never seen Paris in October. I should not have thought that it could have had so provincial a look. There is no question but that the idlers, the society people, the fine carriages are decorative and that they create an agreeable atmosphere. One notices this when they are missing. The American women one meets at this season do nothing but shopping and trying on of dresses. They are preparing for their departure and their fine feathers are in their trunks. The society people will arrive in November. The streets are animated with breaks full of those individuals known in France as "Cook's tourists." This agency seems to have been charged with the mobilising of millions of individuals. The creation of it was one of the first signs of the times. Everyone makes fun of these good people. They inspire me with affectionate interest. I think that they are the collaborators of Providence and valuable collaborators too. As soon as they have earned money, the irresistible desire comes to them to travel, to see beautiful things, to know the consecrated places of earth. Without being aware of it, they are storing up impressions which will develop their mentality, and this they will give out around them and transmit to their children. Is not the past destined to urge on the present and aliment the future? The other day in the Place Vendôme I saw a break full of Cook's travellers pull up at the column. The guide gave a short but clear history of it in a loud voice. All those eyes, which had come from so far, were rivetted on the bronze shaft, with an expression of ardent curiosity, and the memory of Napoleon, evoked by it, brought to those common faces a certain radiance, a flash of emotion. The tragic image of the hero was probably photographed in some cell of their brains. What was this to produce? Ah,

it is no use asking that. I realised the occult work, though, and it stirred me with admiration. I felt a sentiment of respect for those in whom it was being accomplished. In truth the gods seem to be preparing, here below, a most wonderful work. They are delivering over to us, one by one, their secrets, giving us new forces, putting us into closer communion. They employ great and small means for accelerating our cerebral activity. The invention of picture postcards, for instance, had no other end in view, I daresay, than to multiply images. This month, the views I have received are strangely different: Darjiling, in India, with its chain of snowy peaks, the marble palace of Mr. Belmont at Newport; a certain district of New York with buildings of twenty-two storys, the Palisades of the Hudson, a peaceful street in a Touraine village; an old church. Each one of these cards provoked different sensations, gave birth in me to a crowd of thoughts and reflections, and nothing of all that is lost.

*Paris.*

By way of rusticating this Autumn, I have only had the Tuileries. That is not much, but I am very fond of "my garden." During the winter and the spring, when I take my tea at the hotel, I go there for my walk. I do not know by whom it was designed, but there is a harmony about its lines of which one never wearies. Every day it has a different look. My favourite terrace is the one overlooking the Place de la Concorde on the right side. It is nearly always deserted. Now and then a couple of lovers come there to take refuge, middle-class people, professors, employès, young *bourgeois* women out of love with their prosaic life. Such lovers are ill at ease, and out of pity I keep clear of them.

The sight of the Place de la Concorde fascinates me.

There is nothing like it in the world. There is a joyous activity about it. It is like the thoroughfare of a great ant-hill. By the side of the rapid automobiles, cabs begin to have a comical look. In twenty years time, they will probably have disappeared. I have more than once regretted not having someone to stroll about with there, who takes an interest in Life and knows how to look at it merely as a spectator. When going along the path which skirts the Rue de Rivoli I often stop and lean on the balustrade to observe the children as they play below. The present generation of children, at the age of ten or twelve years, seems to me decidedly better looking and more healthy. I have noticed that in sports, even the more violent ones, our Latin race has a gracefulness, a suppleness, quite foreign to the Saxon race. And the future, as I see it, in the sweet, bright faces of the children, seems to me full of promise.

The sunset is one of the glories of Paris. It gives to the sky pink mauves, greenish yellows, shades of light such as I have never seen elsewhere. The busy crowd never even sees all this. On certain evenings, the sunset gives to the plebeian Tuileries a royal and imperial splendour, under which all the vulgarities which dishonour them disappear. Yesterday, seated near to Christophe's "Woman with the Mask," I saw the autumn in its zenith of glory. The whole sky seemed to be of bright gold, the branches of the freshly-clipped trees still had their reddish shades, the chrysanthemums in the flower-beds and the strewn leaves completed a harmony of colour which made a sort of symphony in yellow. The water in the pool was sleeping, the air quite still. A single bird's cry, shrill and sad, came through the space, and then there was silence, as though to permit all creatures to hear this supreme note that Nature takes a year to produce, and which will never

be repeated. I heard it, and so I consider that my month of October has not been lost.

*Paris.*

My third novel is to appear in a well-known Review on the 15th of December. Ever since my return, I have been busy repolishing it. This repolishing puts more light into it. I see it and I feel it myself, and it causes me a delicate pleasure. It is probable that few readers will appreciate this clearness, but no matter. I always have a desire for perfection which I must satisfy to the best of my ability. My literary conscience is only at rest at this price. I feel no hurry and no joy to see my novel appear. Such as it is, written by hand in my little halfpenny exercise-books, it is very dear to me. I am greatly attached to it, and when I touch it, I feel a certain physical enjoyment, as though it were something living. When I look at it typewritten, it appears foreign to me, but when once it is printed and in circulation, I have some difficulty in believing that it is by me. A similar phenomenon takes place with mothers it appears. As their children grow up they realise less and less that they were born of them. Reading my novel over again recalled to me its origin and its development, very distinctly. Two years and a half ago, an old friend was kind enough to take me for a drive to the Bois in his carriage. As we were coming back down the Champs Elysées, he began to speak with admiration about the book Zola had just written on Rome.

"Why should you not write an Italo-American book?" he suddenly said to me. "You understand the characteristics of both races, you might do something very good."

"Nothing as powerful as the work by Zola," I answered. "That would discourage me."

"It would be different. Don't be too ambitious, but try."

The last words were uttered at the turning of the Hôtel Continental and the Rue de Castiglione. It was there that my novel was born. A woman and an author can always, I am sure, tell the exact creative second.

Curiously enough, the idea was put into my mind by an Italian married to an American woman. It was perhaps inspired by the contrasts, the incompatibilities, the incomprehensions from which he had suffered. Chi lo sà? Anyhow it was not to be lost. It germinated, but slowly and against my will. Every time that it began to spring up, I buried it again. Three months later, at the Hôtel Beau-Rivage at Ouchy, I noticed a young Roman with his mother. His table was quite near mine. I took pleasure in watching him, without any intention of making any mental notes, but simply because he had handsome, classical features and the Latin charm. I was not long in discovering that he was in love with a very pretty American woman whom I knew. I saw it in his eyes, in his changeable expression, full of passion and jealousy. I saw, too, the resistance of the young married woman, who was very good, but coquettish, and who liked to please. This interested me, as do all the manifestations of Life. Thanks to this, the idea of the Italo-American novel developed rapidly, and triumphed over everything in spite of me. I remained harnessed to it for two whole years. The result that I now have to look at seems to me rather satisfactory than otherwise. It remains to be seen whether the public will be of my opinion. I have tried to study, within myself, the gestation of the production of a novel. It is almost impossible to account to one's self for the

phenomenon, and it must be quite different with each author. I do not believe that the brain is a generator. It seems to me that it is merely a receptive and transmitting apparatus. We say, intuitively, perhaps, "I have an idea," or "an idea came to me." Yes, the idea comes, it comes from outside. That, at least, is my impression. The elements necessary for the procreation of a work are sent to us in the most unexpected manner, sometimes in the most startling way. The models appear and reappear in our orbit, as though to allow us to render them better. Men of science, art and letters are all helped in this way. The brain is previously prepared, without our being aware of it. According to my idea, the novelist works exactly as the painter does. It seems to me that I have, in my mind, certain faculties which perform the office of paint-brushes. The one sketches, the other takes from inside and outside parcels of life, the other groups them, develops the images, the scenes, touches them up and retouches them, until they have attained the desired degree of perfection. I long, all the time, for the last word to arrive, and yet I never write it without a pang. I feel, distinctly, that it is something of myself that is leaving me. I have often wondered of what use are the monuments that men raise at the price of so much effort, the pictures that they paint, the objects of art that they fashion, the musical and literary works that they produce. Many a time, at my publisher's, on looking at the shelves laden with yellow or green books, I have said to myself "What is the good of all this?" Novels, particularly, used to seem to me childish things. I have felt rather humiliated, even, at having produced any. This morning, while I was slowly drinking my tea, the question was formulated in my mind for the thousandth time. Suddenly, the idea came to me, and it cer-

tainly did *come* to me, that monuments, works of art, books, novels, were all accumulators, in the most concrete sense of the word, veritable piles of psychical electricity. A wave of joyful emotion was produced in me, and I put down my cup and rose, exclaiming, "That is the explanation, certainly." Accumulators, destined to maintain life, to renew it, just as torches light other torches, which propagate and preserve the sacred fire. The more perfect the work, the more force and strength must the accumulator have. What power in the picture of a Michael Angelo or a Raphael! Our Louvre and all the Louvres, are they not full of accumulators? Many have come to us from very far, and they have not been collected by mere chance. Each one is destined to touch certain brains, to produce certain effects. This conception seemed to me true, very probable and wonderful. I fell back into my arm-chair, feeling the sensation of a widened vision. A conversation which I had had the evening before came back to my memory. Without being aware of it, it had perhaps influenced my thought this morning. A well-known American lawyer, who has lived for years in Paris, a man of cultivated mind and refined nature, told me of the pleasure he felt when he saw any of his country people sensitive to the things of art, to the souvenirs of the Old World. He told me that one day in England, in Winchester Cathedral, one of his travelling companions, a rough sort of Yankee, who, during the whole voyage had done nothing but drink and gamble, and whom he had avoided like the plague, came up to him all at once and said, in a low, deeply affected voice, "It's too beautiful, I must shake hands with somebody." And the two men, there and then, exchanged a hearty and never-to-be forgotten hand-shake. On another occasion on the road to the Acropolis, a very gay and very vulgar American had

been telling coarse stories all the time. They had disgusted Mr. K— for he saw beforehand his whole pilgrimage spoiled. On arriving at the top of the sacred hill, in front of the glorious ruin, the man seemed to be struck by it. The expression of his face changed, and a minute after he stuttered out, "I'm sorry to have talked as I did, coming up to see this."

"The *Victoire de Samothrace* has more force and more influence than any other statue," added Mr. K—. "I remember taking one of my colleagues from New York to see the Louvre. He is the busiest and most prosaic of men. He looked at everything without understanding and without feeling anything and I was furious. When we came to the triumphant messenger he raised his arms instinctively, and, with a deep sigh, exclaimed, 'Ah, here's something that rests one.'"

Yes, it is an accumulator! Winchester Cathedral is an accumulator of harmony; the Acropolis is an accumulator of beauty; the great mutilated woman is an accumulator of hope; and the novel I have here on my table is an accumulator, poor and feeble, perhaps, but an accumulator all the same.

And now I come to think of it, are not all creatures, men and animals, accumulators of various forces, of higher or lower life? Do not the dead, even, the saints, heroes, poets and artists supply humanity with its great sources of energy? It seems to me that every day some scales fall from my eyes. I am like a blind person, slowly recovering sight, and my eyelids still close when the ray of light is too strong.

*Paris.*

Guy has come back to Paris. He came to call the very day of his arrival and sent a splendid bunch of chrysanthemums up to me. I did not receive him in

the hotel drawing-room, but in my own room. His tall figure made me realise its small proportions. I felt embarrassed, and pointed to an arm-chair in rather an awkward way. There was a moment of inevitable emotion for us both. After thanking him for the flowers, I asked for news of Uncle Georges, his brother and the Canoness.

"What a void there is at 'Les Rocheilles' godmother," he said, nervously clasping the arm of his chair. "I have been tempted to rush away several times to escape from it, but I stayed, because I do not want mother ever to be dead. She would have had a horror of our letting there be silence around her memory. We have got into the way of assembling in the drawing-room of the left wing, where she always received her intimate friends. I put her portrait by the side of father's."

The name of father, applied to Monsieur d'Hauterive, brought a fugitive blush to my cheeks.

"You did rightly," I stammered out.

"We talk there, play cards and have music. She will at least be with us, even if we can no longer be with her."

"It is great happiness, to have our dead so dear to us," I said.

"It is, isn't it?"

The young man, in a voice full of feeling, talked to me for a long time about his mother, without any sentimentality but with deep affection. He then told me about family affairs, as though he wanted me to feel that I was one of the family. I listened to him in a vague way. He was seated facing me, but placed so that I saw him with a three-quarter outline. The light rested on his face, and the cheek tinged with amber and the tawny moustache gave his face the warm, rather reddish colour-

ing peculiar to my husband. I was more fascinated than irritated, so much fascinated that I gave a slight start when he held out a letter to me!

"Look what I found after you left," he said, "read it."

It was from Colette and I read. She told her son that she had asked me to replace her in case she should be taken away. She begged him to consult me in all serious circumstances, and she added something like the following words. "Be a son to her. Bring her gently back from her isolation. She cannot possibly be satisfied with living on the branch. At her age she needs security and rest. Give her all this. Your love and your strong arm must always be at her service. I count on you for making her old age happy."

Poor Colette! She wanted to give me this son who ought to have been mine. What an ardent desire for reparation there was in those lines.

"You see, god-mother," he said, taking back his mother's letter, "she has left us to each other. For my part, I adopt you," he added, smiling, "and I shall obey the instructions given me."

"Fortunately for you," I said, trying to dissimulate my emotion, "I am an old woman, very much occupied, and very independent."

He rose.

"I know, I know," he answered. "You will have to make a little place for me, though, in your life. I promise you to respect your work, but not your independence. For instance I am going to begin by asking you if I may come and dine with you to-morrow — may I?"

What an odd thing human nature is? I had intended inviting Guy, and now I hardened myself involuntarily against his request.

"To-morrow, to-morrow," I said, as though trying

to think whether I had any engagement. "Yes, I am free," I added, finally, ashamed of this petty feeling. "Come; I shall be very glad to see you. Dinner is at half past seven."

He put his arm round my neck.

"Thank you, and try to like me a little, god-mother," he said, gently. "I am very fond of you, very fond indeed."

I was chilled through by the strange feeling that those words were being spoken by Monsieur de Myères, and well — I did not want him to care for me!

Guy dined with me. His arrival made quite a sensation. Four pretty American women of my acquaintance gazed at me with notes of interrogation in their eyes. The most inconceivable and ridiculous part of the whole affair is that Guy's good looks flattered my vanity. Heaven knows, though, that that has nothing to do with me. The waiter put two plates before me, so that I was obliged to serve my guest. I did so, and it gave me a curious and profound pleasure. At times the thought of the strangeness of the situation crossed my mind, and my throat became dry. The young man talked to me a long time about his projects, he initiated me into the details of his life. He lives on the ground floor flat of a house in the Rue d'Aguesseau, which was part of his inheritance from his god-mother. He intends going to the lectures at the Grignon school all the winter, and he will go every day in the automobile Panhard is to send him, a very practical and safe machine, it appears, in which he intends taking me for my tour through France. The careless way in which my guest looked at the very fascinating women who were there would have proved to me that he was in love, if I had not known it.

"See how American beauty lights things up," I said smiling.

"Yes, but it does not warm — brr!" he replied, in a joking way. "It is the illustration of the principle 'more light, less warmth; more warmth, less light.'"

"And you prefer warmth?"

"I like a happy mixture of the two."

"The impossible."

"No, oh no, it is to be found," he answered, with a sudden gleam in his eyes and a little smile of pride.

I quite understood.

This dinner that I had dreaded was more agreeable than otherwise. Towards the end of it, though, it began to get on my nerves. All the sentiments that Guy provokes in me are strangely tinged with affection, hatred, fascination and loathing. His presence soon becomes painful to me, and then, when he goes away, my heart literally runs after him. I should like to be able to hate him thoroughly or love him generously.

*Paris.*

I am tempted to thank Sir William Randolph at once. I have just had a visit from Madame and Mademoiselle de Lusson and I have not had so agreeable an impression for a long time. French people, as a rule, do not like being received in a hotel drawing-room. I feel this, and it paralyses me. My visitors of to-day did not appear to be affected by the chilly commonplace surroundings. A sympathetic current was at once set up between us. There was not even any ice to break, our mutual friend had prepared our minds so well.

Madame de Lusson is a woman of about fifty, fair and just turning grey, with pleasant features and a happy, attractive expression. The daughter is of medium

height, very elegant in her tailor costume, astrakhan bolero and ermine fur. She captivated me at once. Curiously enough, she made me think of Guy's ideal, "a happy mixture of light and warmth." It seemed to me that I saw those two forces shining over her face. There is light in her dark blonde hair, so thick and wavy, in her blue-grey eyes, her clear complexion; the warmth of kindliness is on her pretty lips, and, besides this, if I am not mistaken, there is strength in the wide forehead, the straight eyebrows, the shapely nose. As soon as we had exchanged our first hand-shake she looked at me with a little emotion that was very juvenile.

"And you are Jean Nöel, Madame!" she said.

"Not a young woman, you see," I replied. "Don't be too deeply disappointed."

"Well, you won't believe me, perhaps, but I am delighted. We can, at least, talk and discuss things together. I am not allowed masculine novelists, of course," she added, smiling.

After that the conversation flowed freely. We talked about Simley Hall, about England, Touraine. I had tea brought in, and I found, not without pleasure, that my guests could drink it. And all the time I felt in mother and daughter a feint vein of cosmopolitanism which contributed, no doubt, to put us in communion with each other. Monsieur de Lusson is still in the country. I accepted an invitation to dinner for the following week, on condition that it should be quite informal, and we all separated with a sincere desire, I think, to meet again.

*Paris.*

My third novel began to-day in the *Revue de France*. I received a telegram of congratulation from the Randolphs, and another from Uncle Georges. Two friends, now at the hotel, sent me some chrysanthemums, the

Lussons some orchids, and Guy — well, he sent me some red roses, of course. What made him choose these, I should very much like to know. Red roses! They were not only my favourite flower, but those of my husband too, and we loved them in a superstitious way. There were always a few in the small drawing-room which separated or rather united our bedrooms. I had banished red roses for fifteen years. When any happened to be sent to me I had always thrown them away remorselessly. The very sight of them has been very painful to me for a long time. This morning when, after breaking the florist's seal, I saw a vivid bunch of them appear, my hands began to tremble nervously. They seemed to hypnotise me, but the thought never occurred to me to get rid of them. I gazed at them with increasing and delicious emotion, and then timidly, almost ashamed, I smelt their fresh, penetrating perfume. It went to my very heart, it took me back to the threshold of that past which was my lost Paradise, and it brought a blush to my face. Flowers can do all that! They are there quite near me, and I gaze at them with a sort of religious terror. It seems to me that they are an offering from my husband. And are they not? In order to judge Life as it ought to be judged, we must have the courage to look it in the face, to forget ourselves, and that is very difficult. And so Jean Noël cannot help admiring the way in which these love-flowers so dear to memory, have forced the door and the heart of the betrayed woman, but Madame de Myères suffers foolishly by it.

In spite of my anger, I have more than once regretted that my husband should not have read my novels. I would give much for certain pages to have passed before his eyes. To-day I have been trying to picture to myself the expression of his face, if, on coming back to the

world, I could have introduced to him this other self, whom he did not know, and whom he, nevertheless, helped to create. I could see in his eyes an immense surprise, and under his tawny moustache a tremor of emotion. I could hear him murmur, almost incredulously, "Antone — Jean Noël!" Then I imagined that he took my hand, and lifted it to his lips as in the olden days, as a sign of approval, and I positively blushed with pleasure. Surely it must have been the flowers that caused this hallucination. I have always said that they are dangerous little things.

On the publication of my last two novels, I was so unknown that it would not have been very painful if they had not proved successes. It would be painful to me now, because of those friends who have so recently come into my life, and particularly because of Guy. Yes, a failure before my husband's son would humiliate me terribly. He must see me triumphant. This wish is full of petty vanity, I know, but I am not above feminine weaknesses. I acknowledge all of them, for Nature will be able to transform them into forces.

I had the *Revue de France* sent to Sir William. He reads French better than he speaks it. I am glad to know that he will thoroughly understand me. I glanced again through the first part of my novel to see whether it would have any chance of interesting him. I think it will. I know exactly the passages which will rouse his satirical vein, which will make him want to argue with me, and the passages, too, that will make his expressive nostrils dilate with emotion. And those little black letters are going to produce all that! Those little black letters! But they will make me go on living, neither more nor less than that; they give me an infinite power. It is by means of them that my mind will go and communicate with that distant mind. Since I have been ca-

pable of understanding what human handwriting in reality is, I never look at it without respect and wonder. Even the type-setters are now of great importance in my eyes. I am glad to have seen the grandeur of my own littleness.

This evening I dined with two young friends who pass a few months of the year at the Hôtel de Castiglione. The husband was born in the Antilles, the wife is English, and we have known each other now for a long time. I paid them two visits in England, and I commenced one of my novels at their house. I have always finished my luncheon and dinner before them, and I then join them at their table. We discuss the events of the day. Both of them are interested in Life, and we watch it together. This is a very great pleasure. There are so few people capable of getting outside the circle of their own existence. In the evening we play bridge. I am rather inclined to think that Providence sent them to me to keep me "in my box." If I had not had them, I should probably have sought worldly distractions, which would have taken me from my work. They were very much interested in this last novel, as they were in the others, and we had agreed to celebrate its appearance with the best champagne in the hotel. This arrangement prevented my inviting Guy and he was visibly disappointed.

"God-mother," he said, with an accent of reproach, "in certain circumstances, the family ought to come before strangers."

"Strangers have been my only family for fifteen years," I answered, wickedly; "I could not neglect them at present."

"I understand that," he said; "but at least give me the precedence over them," and, seizing my hand, he added, "Come, now, will you promise?"

"No, no," I answered, brusquely, "at my age I cannot make fresh engagements."

This pained him, I could see, and I felt a secret satisfaction. I was obeying an obscure, instinctive desire for vengeance. It was the father I wanted to wound in the son. I blushed as I realised this. When one begins to go in for autopsychology one must be sincere, though, and just now, I said that I was glad to have seen the grandeur of my littleness. Well, now I will add that I see the pettiness of all my grandeur.

*Paris.*

Guy has had his revenge. He came to fetch me early to-day with a nice carriage from his Club and insisted on taking me to the Bois. It was a wonderful Sunday for December. The air was cold and fresh but not bitterly cold. At my request we went along the most deserted paths. The bluish mist, the black branches of the trees, the dark green of the moss which covered their trunks, all blended with an art of which Nature alone is capable. Through the open window of the carriage, a little of the silence and repose of the Winter reached me. I stopped talking and listening, and a sensation of comfort, of dreaminess took possession of me. I did not know whither we were driving so gently, nor whence we had come. It was exquisite, that complete oblivion. How long a time it lasted I cannot tell. I came to myself again when we were near the lake.

"What a delightful drive!" I said to my companion. And, with that happy knack that I have of changing from one mood to another, I began to chat gaily, and to watch the crowd dressed in its Sunday clothes. It was half-past three when we left the Bois. The carriage went down the Champs Elysées again, and turned into the Avenue d'Antin.

"Where are we going?" I asked, in surprise.

"To 60, Rue d' Aguesseau," replied Guy, his face lighting up with mischief.

"To your abode?"

"To my abode. I am going to give you tea."

"No, no," I exclaimed, impulsively. "We will have it at the Ritz."

"Not at all. You are my guest, or rather my prisoner, and the coachman has had his orders. I would wager that you have never had tea in a bachelor's den."

"Never, that I remember," I said, half laughing and half vexed.

"Well, then, that would be a thing missing in your life. A novelist likes fresh experiences. I have arranged one for you. All women have the curiosity to like to breathe, if only for once, the atmosphere of a bachelor's abode. Mothers delight in visiting the den where their son lives his life."

"Who gave you that information?"

"No one."

"My compliments, then, for your gift of intuition."

"When mother came to Paris, she used to stay at the hotel, but I always invited her to luncheon and tea. She loved these little festivities. She always arrived a little excited and her hands full of flowers. Before leaving she made an inspection of my household, opened the cupboards and the chests of drawers, to see that I was not short of anything. She used to shake my pillows, under pretence of seeing that they were quite right, but in reality just to fondle them."

I looked at the precocious psychologist with increasing stupefaction.

"Women's hearts have no more secrets from you," I said, ironically.

"Mother was so thoroughly a woman and I was her

Benjamin. Between ourselves, she always liked me better," he remarked, "than my brother."

"Ah!" I said, my heart feeling suddenly heavy. The young man put his hand on mine.

"And as she has asked you to take her place, you must see my rooms. Besides, I'll wager you were dying to do so."

A flush of anger came to my face.

"I know," said Guy, with a smile. "You are a thorough woman too, thank Heaven!" he added, raising my hand to his lips.

At that moment the carriage stopped and we got out. I felt strangely moved. It was not without a certain pleasure that I recognised the domestic who opened the door for us. It was Louis, a brother of the cook at "Les Rocheilles." The good fellow's face brightened with pleasure on seeing me. His master had evidently told him of my visit. Guy showed me into a large study which Colette, painted by C—, seemed to fill entirely. I went to her at once.

"Which portrait do you prefer?" asked Guy. "The one at Les Rocheilles or this one?"

The question troubled me. The portrait at "Les Rocheilles" represented a brilliant, happy woman, the irresistible "Linnet" whom we had so dearly loved. This one, which dated from five years back, gave a very different impression. The fascinating smile in the eyes had given way to a melancholy that was pathetic, the laughing mouth had become severe. In the attitude of the head and body there was a firmness, absolutely foreign to Madame d'Hauterive of olden times.

"I prefer this portrait," I said at last, with the meritorious desire to be just, with regard to the perfected work of Providence.

"I, too. In the other she is younger. I recognise

her features, but her expression is unknown to me, and makes her seem like a stranger to me."

He little thought what truth there was in his words. He was the son of this woman and not of the other one. After throwing a kiss on my two fingers to Colette, I went to one of the French windows. By the waning daylight I saw a few stone steps, some trees and shrubs.

"Why, you have a garden!" I exclaimed, "and you never told me. Ah that's what I envy you!"

"It is charming in the Spring, as you shall see. I have two old sycamores full of nests, and lilac, violets and primroses."

Guy took off my cloak, and my fur in a gentle way and then, picking up the *Revue de France* which was on his desk, he said ———

"You see, when I came back from Grignon yesterday, I dined here alone and passed all the evening with you. And what a delightful evening it was! I am glad that mother read it, too," he added, with emotion. "It means more success for Jean Noël!"

"We shall see whether you are a good prophet," I answered, thoroughly rejoicing at heart to hear his words.

In spite of my secret resistance, this room, to which I had been brought in so strange a way, charmed me at first sight. Two book-cases stood half way up the walls the rest of which were hung with old prints, drawings, engravings and arms. On the mantel-shelf, there was an antique bust of a woman and there were also bunches of yellow chrysanthemums. The electric light and the flame from the fire made the brass mountings of the Empire furniture shine and at the same time they softened its lines. In a corner there were some cups of delicate china, and some dainties spread out on a round table, covered with a cloth trimmed with guipure lace. Three splendid

red roses marked my place at the table. The sight of them made me start. Guy saw this.

"I hope, god-mother," he said, "that you like red roses. I simply love them."

"Naturally," I replied, bitterly.

"Mother liked them," he continued, "because they are the symbol of sacrifice."

"And you," I put in, "because they are the symbol of love as well as sacrifice."

A blush passed over the young man's face, and he gave a happy laugh.

"Yes, I must confess that love appeals to me more than renunciation. I only have one thing with which to reproach those roses and that is they don't know how to die. Have you noticed that they turn quite black?"

"Yes, as though they were burnt, a true image of dead passion."

"That is so, and it makes me ridiculously sad."

The domestic entered with the samovar. He closed the shutters, drew the curtains and arranged the fire. My host installed me comfortably, and prepared the tea, with a care that betrayed he had had good practice in afternoon teas. On looking round, I smiled.

"What amuses you?" asked Guy.

"The sight of your bookcases reminded me of a remark that an American woman made to me a few days ago. I was lecturing her for having gone to take tea, although she had a friend with her, at Count M—'s 'Oh, there were lots of books about, that made it all right!' she said."

"That's good, that is!" exclaimed my host, laughing.

"Yes; but I was charmed by that subtle instinct, by means of which the young woman had felt that books were like silent witnesses, a sort of protection. Accord-

ing to that," I added by way of jesting, "this must be the respectable room of your abode."

"And respected always, you cannot doubt that," said the young man, glancing up at the portrait of his mother. Not a sound from outside reached us, and this provincial silence added to the comfort and cosiness of our afternoon tea. Besides this, I was under the cruel charm of Guy's resemblance to his father. It had never shown itself so distinctly as now, when he was quite at ease in his own home, where I saw him for the first time. Good God, how great the resemblance was! I had insisted on his smoking a cigarette after tea, and he smoked just as my husband used to. At a certain moment I had the impression that Monsieur de Myères was really before me, and that we were alone in this world.

"It is strange!" I exclaimed, unconsciously, after my brief hallucination.

"What?" asked my companion, astonished at this exclamation, for which there seemed to be no reason.

"This tea with you," I replied, laughing nervously.

"I captured you cleverly, didn't I? I was rejoicing all the week at the good trick I was going to play you. You are not angry with me for it, are you, god-mother? Say you are not. It is such a pleasure to have you here. It is so nice to be with you."

"Why shouldn't it be nice to be with me. I am not crabby, as far as I know."

"It is not a question of disposition, I think, but of secret affinities. There are elements in you, probably, which make me happy. I have never felt this except with mother and with you."

"Oh, with another woman, too, I fancy."

The young man's face lighted up.

"With another woman, too; yes," he repeated, lowering his eyelids to hide the love in his eyes.

"No doubt," I said, "every creature has a special atmosphere. One meets with women who are young, pretty and intelligent, but who possess no magnetism. In spite of their efforts, people keep clear of them. Those, for instance, who are magnetic attract invincibly. My doctor told me that, considering the diversity of our respective fluids and the struggle that goes on between them, he was surprised that there are not more unhappy marriages."

"Your doctor might have found out the cause of these incompatibilities which bring about so many disasters. In your opinion, which is the truest and most lasting love — that which springs up at the first meeting, or that which germinates slowly?"

"You ask a difficult question. It seems to me though, that for love at first sight, or, in other words, for the short circuit to occur, there must be stronger affinities. I even believe that for creatures to be attracted by each other like this, they must have been in relation with each other previously, elsewhere."

"Yes — yes," murmured Guy, "and in once more taking possession, in this instantaneous union, there is something all powerful, something inevitable. How beautiful love is, isn't it, god-mother?" he said, lifting his head with a movement of manly pride.

"It is the marvel of marvels," I replied, gravely. I rose and went across to the hearth. "Fire and flame are beautiful, too," I said, in order to break the silence that had fallen between us.

"And this sensation of being at home, isn't it pleasant? You can never have it at the hotel."

"I am used to doing without it, now," I replied.

"You wouldn't be sorry to have it again, I am sure. Do you know, a good idea has occurred to me."

"What is it?"

"The lease of the tenant who has the flat on the second floor is up next year. You ought to have that flat."

"No, no; this ground-floor with the garden is the only one that would tempt me. When you marry you can let me have it," I said, with the intention of sounding him.

"Marry — I marry! Ah, my dear god-mother, if you are reckoning on that! . . . Never, never!"

"Marriage frightens you?"

"No; a young girl does though."

"Oh, that is not so grave."

"The Latin runs more risk of being disappointed than the Oriental."

"You exaggerate."

"Not at all. His fiancée is almost as unknown to him, morally; and if he should happen to meet with a girl of the wrong kind he has no harem, where he can shut her up and then make up for his disappointment. I know a number of young wives who are warnings to me. They have either a bad or a petty conception of life. The idea of maternity is repugnant to them. They detest the country and the open air; they must have the atmosphere of places of amusement, and they can never be sufficiently saturated with smoke and vulgarities. They do not read, they literally live on those little spicy stories which form the conversation at luncheons and dinners now-a-days. When they are tired of seeing objectionable things, they try them on for themselves, and go in for having a lover by way of creating an interest in life."

"That all happens in the society which you frequent, but in the older *bourgeois* society, and in the real aristocracy, there are plenty of very high-minded women."

"I know; but unfortunately they know nothing of modern life, and they don't prepare their children for it.

This summer at Bagnoles, at the picnic balls we gave at the Grand Hôtel, I danced and talked with the sister of my friend d'Urville, a pretty girl, brought up with the best of principles, I do not doubt. The parents have a country estate in the neighbourhood. They stay there until December for the shooting. She told me how it bored her to have to stay in the country until so late in the season, and she owned to me that she and her sister were reduced to making pancakes by way of entertainment."

"Pancakes! The archaism of that is delightful! In the eighteenth century it was the great amusement in the convents. Mademoiselle de Charolais was making pancakes in the Château of Madrid, when her lover was brought in, mutilated by a stag. And so there are still girls in France who make pancakes!"

"And you may be sure they don't succeed with them."

"With your ideas, the Anglo-Saxon woman would suit you better."

"No, she is never more than a comrade. I should want a woman who would be wife, mistress and friend."

"Only that?"

"And I shall never find her in all these dolls, pulled forward by their garters."

"Guy, Guy, be proper," I said, laughing in spite of myself. "How are you so well informed?"

"Thanks to the shop-windows, in the first place, and then to the gait of the young persons in question. At present they are being subjected to a torture which takes away from them all suppleness and grace, and gives them the deportment of crabs."

"Nature is certainly engaged in modifying the structure of woman.

"Anyhow, it does not seem to be preparing her for maternity," said my host bad-temperedly.

"Come, come," I said, "it is evident that the present state of your heart does not allow you to think of marriage. When you have sufficiently sacrificed to the false goddesses, you will think better of it, and, perhaps, before I die I shall have your flat and garden."

"If the goddess I love is false, god-mother, there is not a true one."

After these words, which showed plainly enough how deeply the young man was in love, I prepared to take my departure. Guy showed me the rest of his flat. The furniture, like that of his library, is of the purest Empire. He has inherited it from his god-mother. The drawing-room opens on to the garden. A picture by Roybet, two landscapes by Harpignies, some Tanagra statues, a piano and some beautiful vases give it a warm, congenial atmosphere. The bedroom is plain, but elegant. The look of this bachelor's abode gave me an impression of moral cleanliness, of dignity. There was nothing to indicate any kind of pose. I do not know whether it was the effect of my imagination, but I had the sensation of a presence. Was it that of the false or the true goddess? I felt curiously ill at ease, and could not look straight at the various objects, nor look at them long. I only walked through the rooms, and, when once outside again, I breathed in a good supply of fresh air, to chase away the something which oppressed me.

Guy took me back to the hotel. I ought to have kept him for dinner, but had not the courage to do so. I was upset, bruised, as it were, inwardly, as I am every time I spend any time with him. And now I am full of curiosity to know the woman he loves. He is too discreet and chivalrous to confide in me about that. She must

be dark, with a dull, white skin, as there was a great deal of pale yellow in the Rue d'Aguesseau flat. If I am to fulfil the mission which Colette imposed upon me, Providence will help me in it.

*Paris,*

*New Year's Day.*

In spite of ourselves we always turn round and look back at the landmarks on our path here below. I am amazed at having stood the shock of all the events which have succeeded each other these last four months as well as I have. When I began writing these pages I only intended to take down the impressions of a spectator. I flattered myself that I had lived everything down, and that from henceforth peace and rest would be my lot in life. I am evidently destined to continue the struggle. My smooth, easy path has come to a sharp turn, and it is now hard, unequal and rough, so that I am once more shaken mercilessly. I will not pretend that I regret my fine peace. I dare be frank now, and I will confess that I like to feel my heart beating and my veins throbbing. In this struggle with the father, through the son, I find a kind of pleasure. This odious resemblance of Guy d'Hauterive makes the heart-strings, which I believed broken for ever, vibrate as though touched with a bow; and however much I suffer, it is not without a certain pleasure that I hear them. It is a curious thing, but the novelist within me takes a keen interest in the phases of this psychological drama. A certain actress was severely blamed for having studied the death grin on the lips of her lover. I can affirm that without Madame de Myères' suffering any less, and without her being any less sincere, Jean Noël was able to seize her impressions, to hear even the altered notes of her voice, and I will add that the more poignant the situation, the more complete was the duality.

I had made up my mind, that whatever might be my increase of fortune, I would never change my way of living, and yet I am now obliged to make some modifications, for I could not continue receiving Guy in my room. When he entered he seemed to take possession of the whole room and of me, too. I felt his presence too much, or rather that of my husband, and it made me want to send him away. I have, therefore, taken the drawing-room, into which another door in my room opens. It is nicely furnished, and a very pleasant room. I have put some green plants in it, some flowers and photographs. I took my pens, ink and paper there, but, to my great surprise, I could not work there, and so, feeling quite penitent, I returned to my dear old table. From time to time I get up and, with childish pleasure, pace up and down these few square yards that have been conceded to me. It seems good, all the same, to have a little more space. Space, infinite space, that is my great idea of Paradise.

I took possession on Christmas Day, and, according to English custom, the owner of the hotel sent to me and to all his visitors some Christmas holly and mistletoe. I have decorated my two rooms with it. I also received a basket of magnificent black grapes from Uncle Georges and orchids, roses and lilac from various friends. When I glance round the room I say to myself that there are many old women in the world who are more forgotten than I am. Guy sent to England for a bridge-table for travelling. It is a perfect gem of cabinet-maker's work, and fits into a box. On his return from "Les Rocheilles," where he has gone for the festivities, he will not fail to want to try it for the first time. I shall not be able to refuse, and Madame de Myères will play bridge with the son of her husband and her cousin. The sight of this will delight the eyes of the humoristic gods, I do not

doubt. What a curious power there is in these ironies of fate, which are so often seen in the lives of nations and individuals.

Like a child, I love receiving Christmas and New Year cards. They come to me from all parts of the globe. English and American women are the most faithful in their memories. There are some whom I have not seen for twelve and fourteen years, and yet they have never missed sending me their "Merry Christmas" or their "Happy New Year" wishes and I like having them. Lady Randolph has sent the portrait of Sir William taken with Freddy, his inseparable companion. This photograph made my heart ache by the intensity of suffering it betrays. With my eyes full of tears, I slipped it into my writing-case. It seemed to me that it would be a profanation to leave it out, exposed to the gaze of strangers. I had some pretty cards from Frank and Lily. The dear children, I can imagine what a pleasure it has been to them to choose them! My parcel of toys, among which was the inevitable Parisian doll, must have crossed their cards on the journey. The purchase of that doll gave me a great deal of trouble. The frightful little persons that were shown to me, with wild yellow hair, large hats with feathers and befrilled underclothes, seemed to me like budding *cocottes*. I thought of the white Simley nursery, little Lily with her simple clothes, her bare legs, and her sandals, and I felt that I could not send her a doll of this kind. After vainly endeavouring to find one that was both elegant and proper, I had to have one dressed. It was welcomed with transports of joy, and named Parisette. Our very dolls show how little we understand children. The sort of lady, that we put into the hands of our little girls, will always be powerless to either awake in them, or to nourish, the sentiment of maternity. They are proud of them, but they can

scarcely love them. And who knows if such dolls do not have a bad, withering action on their fresh young souls?

This custom of exchanging presents and good wishes at certain epochs is so ancient and universal that it seems to be a law of Nature. I begin to suspect it is necessary for accelerating the movement of the "Wheel of Things." As a matter of fact, memories are reawakened, thoughts go out to each other, hearts open, and a sort of wholesome relaxation takes place, an ebullition of life which is probably very profitable. If the wishes were all in vain, we should not have received the instinct to formulate them. These impulses of the will, for the happiness or unhappiness of another person, may create certain currents, disperse or attract certain forces. The least scrupulous of human beings hesitates to wish bad wishes, and the most sceptical of persons is affected by them. I have always liked this rite which marks the commencement of every year, and now it interests me very deeply.

The proprietor of the Hôtel Ritz has the genial idea of inviting to the Christmas Eve supper or *réveillon,* not only the guests staying there, but those who frequent the restaurant and the afternoon tea. In virtue of this I am always invited, and I go, as it amuses me. The little festivity consists of a concert, a Christmas-tree and a supper at little tables, the whole of it very elegant and perfect. As a *tableau vivant* it is curious. The *élite* of the foreign colony is to be seen, pretty American women, great ladies from England, enjoying themselves incognito, a few of the French aristocrats who mix with foreigners, people who have splendid dwellings and probably no homes. Many of the women come on leaving the theatre. Their handsome cloaks are thrown back, showing their evening dresses, their pearls, diamonds and precious stones. Everyone walks up and down the narrow hall, which serves as a drawing-room, and gathers round the

tree to receive the bauble offered by Chance. People shake hands with each other. Each person is astonished to be there, and no one more so than I. Finally we all group ourselves round the little tables and sit down to supper. There is no gaiety on the faces; it is just the same as everywhere else, we do not really enjoy ourselves, but we play at it. The English women only, seem to be really merry. The champagne, which is generously supplied, finally revives the spirits of all these poor worldly people, and the scene becomes brilliant and animated, enough so to give the illusion of enjoyment. Last year I had supper with a nice Franco-American husband and wife. Suddenly the remembrance of my beautiful Christmas Eves at Chavigny rose traitorously to my memory. I thought of the return home with lanterns from the midnight Mass, the agreeable impression on entering the well-lighted dining-room, warmed by the huge logs that flamed in the two fire-grates. I saw myself again at the head of the table, all decorated with greenery and with flowers and fruit, with the priest to my right, friends all round, and my husband opposite me. This vision, which continued to develop itself as though in a cinematograph, arrested the movement of my hand in raising a champagne glass to my lips. I put it down again without drinking. I looked all round and shivered with the coldness of my own solitude. What a distance from the Chavigny Château to the Hôtel Ritz!

This year I spent Christmas Eve by my own fireside with Jean Noël; the following day I dined with the Lussons. They live in the Rue de Lille in a house of their own. They have one of those flats, dating from the end of the eighteenth century, which make one feel the vulgarity of the modern habitation, where the architect employs all his talent of trickery in creating things to deceive the eye. There is a fine suite of rooms with

high ceilings, the over-doors are painted, there are charming door-frames and the rooms look on to an old garden. It is easy to guess, from the very atmosphere, that the furniture, the knick-knacks and pictures have all been there a long time. In this good dwelling-place there are huge green plants, flowers, books, a dog, a cat, and an atmosphere of real kindliness which communicates a sensation of ease and comfort. Sir William was not mistaken in saying that I should like Monsieur de Lusson. We were friends from the first time we shook hands. He is, I am sure, this side of sixty, and has the refined type and the slightly arched nose of the native of Touraine. His hair and moustache are of a very soft grey. At times his eyes have a gleam of wit which seems to light up his very eyeglasses. Curiously enough, we seemed to understand each other immediately, and we carried on the conversation. Madame de Lusson, with her warm-hearted kindness and her natural gaiety, reminds me of Colette. She is the spoilt child of her husband and of her daughter. As to Mademoiselle Josée, she interests and charms me. Her healthy youthfulness, her fine physical and moral vitality, seem to fill the house, and I found myself looking at her as though she were a sunbeam. She continues her studies, goes to classes and lectures with a desire to comprehend Life more thoroughly. She has a wholesome curiosity about it. When a subject interests her, her face takes a completely fixed look; it seems as though she is listening even with her pretty blue-grey eyes. I should be very much surprised if her time here below were not signalised by some good. I like her hand. It is a skilful, active, clever hand, which could dress a wound, give help, arrange flowers, fondle a child or stroke an animal. We ought to study the hand more, for it never deceives us. In such surroundings my Christ-

mas dinner could not fail to be enjoyable. I had not experienced so agreeable a sensation of comfort and family intimacy, in my own country, for a long time. How many people and how many things Providence had employed in order to give me that simple Christmas!

The Lussons seem determined to tear me from my solitude. I struggle against them weakly enough. At times I feel tempted to repel these friendships, to rush away, to go and hide somewhere, to escape from them, from Guy, and from Destiny; but I can feel that I shall not escape. I have the distinct sensation that I am descending a rapid, dizzy slope, and that my soul is emitting its last flame. No matter, it is better to die giving out flame than smoke.

*Paris.*

Formerly Parisian women took cakes or sandwiches and a glass of Spanish wine in the afternoon, at Gagé's, Cuvillier's, or at the Madeline pastry-shop. The tea-room now belongs to our institutions, and afternoon tea has become one of our habits. This little evolution, which has a certain effect on our manners and customs, dates about fifteen years back. It had its origin in the Rue de Rivoli, at a stationer's shop known as the *Papeterie de la Concorde*, kept by two English brothers named Neal. Were they inspired by the memory of the brown teapot which, between half-past four and five, appears in all the City offices in London? Did they think of doing charitable, and at the same time profitable, work, in supplying their country people with a national beverage? This I cannot tell, but certain it is that on two tables at the end of their counter, behind a screen and amidst books and newspapers, they began to serve tea and biscuits. Paris saw for the first time a sign with the words "Afternoon

Tea." Tea and biscuits in a stationer's shop! Only English people would have ventured on that. The sign worked wonders, and more than one Britisher on his holidays, more than one couple of lovers has known this little nook, and still remembers it, perhaps, with gratitude.

That was the birthplace of the tea-rooms which, during the last five years, have sprung up like mushrooms. They are to be found everywhere now, in the Rue Cambon, Rue de Rivoli, Rue St. Honoré, on the road to the Louvre and to the Bon Marché. Paris has gone beyond London in this respect. Does that mean that the Frenchwoman has become a tea-drinker? Not at all, and what is more, she never will be. She neither knows how to drink it, how to prepare it, nor how to serve it. She swallows it in an absent-minded way, like any kind of infusion. It excites her nerves without making her gay. She is too fond of talking, and of showing off to advantage, to give the necessary attention to the teapot, samovar or kettle. She is incapable of repeating several times over the prescribed questions: "Strong or weak? How many pieces of sugar? Cream or lemon?" And when she does ask the questions she never listens to the answers. The tea-room where, if she is not afraid of appearing too *bourgeois*, she takes her chocolate, makes a pleasant halting-place between her shopping and her trying-on. It answers two purposes — her wish to be sociable and at the same time exclusive.

The five o'clock tea at the Hôtel Ritz is certainly the most elegant of any in Paris. The interior is neither imposing nor luxurious. It is only a narrow hall with two rooms opening on to it, but there are footmen and butlers as correct as Embassy *attachés*. The best dressed women in Paris meet there. This creates a

most unique general effect. That space, with mirrors on both sides, has, at the tea-hour, the look of a large aviary full of many-coloured birds, and the noise of the various conversations is like a sort of warbling, but we may add the human warbling is not very harmonious. When I go alone to the Hôtel Ritz, I sit in a corner from which I can take in the whole scene. Madame de Myères likes the rustling of the well-made dresses, and also the beautiful jewellery; Jean Noël is delighted to study and compare the looks and gestures of the specimens under his eyes, and both have "a good time," as the Americans say.

The other day, as I was watching these worldly women file by, with their handsome furs of sable, chinchilla, black or blue fox, one of them caught hers up with a gesture that made me start. Her gesture gave me instantly a retrospective vision of the far-off ancestress who at once appeared before me, tall, strong and majestic, with a wild beast's fleece or skin over her splendid nudity. I saw her standing on the threshold of her cave watching for the return of the man. I gazed in a sort of stupor at this descendant. Nature has continued her work of improvement through the long centuries, and has arrived at this! Yes, she has refined the body of woman, given all kinds of shades to her soul, but within her are the primordial instincts still — jealousy, envy, ruse and cruel coquetry. Her winter garment is different; the wild beast's skin has become a valuable fur, but, as formerly, so the irony of the gods has willed it, this is ornamental with tails, claws, little ferocious heads. And in spite of myself, in this elegant creature taking her tea there and putting the dainties delicately between her painted lips, I could still distinguish the ancestress. From the primitive den to the Hôtel Ritz there is certainly a long distance to

travel, and to go back along the path bewilders one's mind, but I love such bewilderment.

The frequenters of these afternoon teas may be divided into actresses and spectators. The actresses are the Parisian women, the American Duchesses, Marchionesses and Countesses, and the exotics. The spectators are the English and American travellers.

The Frenchwoman sails in. She enters just like a sail-boat with a delicate mast that has the wind behind it, conscious, without looking so, of her elegance and beauty. Her gait, her bearing, her gestures are all in perfect harmony. The Franco-American woman is very stiff and awkward in her attempts to copy the Old World. It is all in vain that she tries to be correct, makes a round with her arm, lifts it to the height of the shoulder to shake hands, she is "not in it," nevertheless. She is "not in it," no, not yet. One guesses the naïve pleasure she feels, the triumph of parading before her countrywomen, of letting herself be seen in "noble company," of hearing her title repeated as she goes along. Why should she not feel this? You and I would have the same satisfaction. The pretty Spanish-American woman is content with exhibiting the latest creations of her milliner and dressmaker. She looks round with her beautiful black eyes, in order to make sure that she is the best-dressed woman present. There is no harm in that.

The Englishwoman, who has come here out of a curiosity, wears a tailor-made dress or, if on her honeymoon, a hideous travelling dress. She drinks her tea religiously, exchanges a few remarks between two pieces of bread-and-butter, and remains rather scared by this foreign mimicry which she does not understand, by this living picture in which she recognises no one. The simple American woman is refreshing to

see in these surroundings. She chatters gaily, takes in, without any scruple, a whole dish of gossip, sees everything, criticises everything, and goes away no wiser by a single jot, but glad to have had her money's worth. Society men are rather rare at the Ritz afternoon tea. A few elderly *marcheurs* are to be seen, and also a few young men who are trying to get into society, whilst certain curious individuals, always the same ones, walk up and down the hall to see who is there and who is not there. I do not know whether I am mistaken, but it seems to me that the Frenchwoman has lost much of her power over man. She is more elegant and knows more, but she can neither attract nor hold him as she did formerly. She has not ceased, though, being very fascinating. I realise, by comparison, her superior charm. Even with these Parisian worldly women, veritable birds of Paradise, whose lives are so narrow, so pitifully stupid, there is an infinitely complex soul full of delicate shades. Many of them excite my curiosity. I try to get a glimpse of their "sincere face," "the one," as Baudelaire says, "that is sheltered by the face that lies," and this is not easy. I have been particularly struck by one of them. She is not a regular comer, but only appears when she is invited, or when she invites others, and she always arrives late. Her general bearing and the way she carries her head make her appear taller than she really is. Her thick, chestnut hair, streaked either naturally or artificially with tawny shades, her dull, white complexion, her painted lips, give her a warm colouring. Her wide forehead, with her straight eyebrows, and her extremely open nostrils, would make the face hard, if it were not softened by golden brown eyes full of light. Her mouth, with its slow, voluptuous smile, is one of the most beautiful and most irresistible I have ever

seen. And yet this woman is not happy, I am sure. At times her face expresses a profound weariness and moral distress, her expression becomes vague, and she only answers in monosyllables. When some word recalls her to herself, she draws herself up at once and lifts her head in a defiant way, as though preparing herself to struggle with an invisible enemy. I have never had an opportunity of finding out her name. The group with which she mingles is the most aristocratic of the assembly. The men kiss her hand with marked devotion, and she has all the characteristics of great races. I had not seen her since my return, and to-day she made her reappearance at the Hôtel Ritz. She looked as though she were in half-mourning. Her body was moulded into a dress of light grey cloth, and on her shoulders she had a truly royal stole of blue-black fox. Her hat was very becoming, a kind of toque trimmed with the same fur. She had two large pearls in her ears and a row of pearls round her neck, and she had never appeared so fascinating to me. In spite of myself now, when I am at the Ritz I think of Guy's beloved, and this afternoon, when my unknown woman entered, I felt a little upset as I wondered whether it could be she. The question came instantaneously to my mind. If she were the woman, then God help him! I can imagine what power she could exercise over a man of his temperament. How Colette would have detested her!

When I see these worldly women, who have charming homes, come day after day to sit at these cold, inconvenient restaurant tables, I cannot help regretting that the most intelligent of them, those who have a social position and who are endowed with magnetic power, do not give a tea once a week at least, a nice well-arranged tea in a friendly way, in order to gather

together, round the samovar, people who are pleasant and well educated. They might thus create a centre where they themselves would shine. They would win some of the men from their cards at the Club. Such victories would do them more honour than the sex victories which most of them can win if they like. God grant that this other ambition may be given to them. At present Nature seems to want to put women of various nationalities together, and they come in a docile way. They do not speak, but they watch and criticise each other mercilessly. With all this, invisible exchanges are probably taking place, there are the indispensable transmissions of images. The tea-rooms have their *raison d'être* like all the rest, but we do not understand. Ah, no, we do not understand!

*Paris.*

I discovered the name of my unknown woman in a curious way, just when I was thinking least about it. Yesterday, the Will that guides my acts and deeds took me to Virot's, in the Rue de la Paix, at exactly the right moment. I am one of the oldest customers of this celebrated millinery house. I have had my hats from there for the last thirty years, first from the great artist who founded the business, then from her two disciples, Madame Marie and Mademoiselle Amélie. I have known all the saleswomen. I buy very little now for myself, but from time to time I go up there to see what they have. I always receive as much attention as formerly, for they all know that I appreciate the real art that is in all their beautiful creations. I sit down by the counter, in a place well known to the old *habituées*. The saleswomen come to see "how my hat is," they take it off to give it a twist. I talk fashions with as much pleasure as I talk painting. I know that Na-

ture inspires her workwomen, that she guides her hand for our hats as well as for our dresses, and these combinations of flowers, ribbons and feathers, which are the agents of feminine destinies, interest me extraordinarily. The day before yesterday I was there in the large show-room, admiring and criticising the hats which were waiting to be purchased, and which will probably be silent witnesses of many strange adventures, when suddenly, behind me, in one of the tall mirrors between the windows, I saw my unknown woman from the Ritz appear. With her arms lifted, she was placing a sort of toque on her reddish-brown hair. Her fur-lined bolero was open, and her blouse of white satin brought into tempting relief the beauty of her figure. Our eyes met in the glass, and for a few seconds we remained as though hypnotised by each other. Then both of us turned round at the same time, with a wheeling movement that was almost comic. She looked at me in a surprised and haughty way, and I replied by a smile. I was at last going to know her name! It seemed to me as though I caught her! Without hurrying, and with affected indifference, I finished going round the room, and then went straight up to the cashier.

"Who is that pretty, dark woman trying on at the back?" I asked him.

"The Marquise de Mauriones, ex-Duchesse de Longwy," he added, lowering his voice.

The Marquise de Mauriones! I had often seen that name in the *Figaro* and the *Gaulois*. The ex-Duchesse de Longwy! By raking my memory I found there a rather confused divorce story which, four years ago, had supplied material for society gossip. I decided to ask my god-son for further information.

*Paris.*

This woman is Guy's beloved! My intuition did not play me false when I saw, distinctly, their two faces together in my mind. Let who will explain the mystery. I little thought I should make this fine discovery to-day, and it was so neatly brought about! Jean Noël is lost in admiration. I very rarely go out in the morning, but for forty-eight hours I had been struggling in the agonies of a literary "deadlock." From a medley of my impressions not one would come out clearly enough to give me the *leit motiv.* Thoroughly exasperated, I put on my hat and set out for a good saunter. I went first to my publisher's, Rue Auber. After a pleasant visit, during which I heard that my novel was a success, I went for what I call a "curiosity walk," stopping before all the windows that interested me. Those of Louchet first, where the wonders of the "Art Nouveau" are shown. The "Art Nouveau," yes, living art, psychological art! Those women lamp-holders, with perverse faces haggard with passion, live and, more than that, suffer; those bodies twined round the bowls are also living. Those ornaments of twisted odd shapes, those admirably-set stones, have a physiognomy. There are rings which have a wicked look, waistband buckles which give an impression of clever and cruel coquetry. And the soul which emanates from these things is a sorrowful, complex soul, a soul that is yearning after something. Artists have been powerless to incarnate, in these masterpieces, a flame of wholesome joy, a ray of hope. In fifty years, perhaps, pages and pages will be written about these knick-knacks, this jewellery; I congratulate myself on having been able to understand and admire them. When I had succeeded in tearing myself away from the Louchet exhibition, I went up the Boulevard,

down the Rue de la Paix and urged on, as always, by an instinctive wish to be in communion with my epoch, I looked at pictures, objects of art, jewellery, *chiffons*, etc. My saunter terminated in a visit to a shop in my neighbourhood, a very modern shop, which has made a name for itself, in Paris and America, by its special stationery and its morocco-leather goods. I had watched this business grow, from the very beginning, in a little shop in the Rue St. Honoré. I had watched not only its development and its transformation, but also the occult change which had taken place in the woman who founded it. She does not know herself how she has arrived at the splendid result attained. She recognises, though, that she owes much to American women. Their need of luxury and elegance was a revelation to her. In order to attract them she exercised her ingenuity, together with the collaboration of the best workmen, to create pretty things.

She began to set card-cases, purses, handbags and writing-table accessories with precious stones. She familiarised herself with the Louis XV, Louis XVI and Empire styles, and drew her inspirations from them. Ideas crowded into her mind; her taste was formed. Under the action of forces, of which she did not even suspect the existence, she began to appreciate colour and line. I notice that to-day she handles, with an artist's unconscious respect, the knick-knacks in her windows. They have evidently become for her more than mere goods. She "works" at her business as I work at my novels. According to her expression, she has her whole shop in her brain. She thinks of it unceasingly. She cannot stay away from it long at a time. She experiences a legitimate pride in feeling that so many people depend on her now. She shows

me her new things with visible pleasure, and her face brightens when I admire them. It is to me a veritable joy to meet with this longing for perfection, this intuition of the beautiful which are the characteristics of our race. She consoles me with regard to the future of France. A halt in a shop like this is more interesting than a social reception. I am always amazed at the amount of effort, intelligence and work that a few cells of our human beehives represents.

This morning, I was there, admiring the mounting and the clasp of a small bag which was just out of the hands of the workman, when an automobile stopped at the door and, quite taken aback, I saw Guy get out of it, Guy, accompanied by a lady wearing a fur coat with the collar turned up and a thick veil over her face. Both of them entered the shop and moved to the right. My god-son raised his hat and asked for an automobile bottle-case like one he had bought before. Whilst this was being fetched, he said a few words to his companion. I literally felt the warmth which emanated from his eyes and his lips. As though he, in his turn, were affected by my thought, he turned his head brusquely my way, his eyes met mine and, colouring violently, he came across to me.

"Outdoors at this hour, god-mother!" he said in the easiest tone he could adopt.

"I am playing truant — like you," I added.

"That's true," he replied, with a nervous smile. "I am on foot. I have asked for a few alterations to be made to my machine, and I am superintending the execution of them. I intended to come and dine with you to-day. May I?"

"Certainly."

"Till this evening, then," he said in a gentle tone of voice.

I nodded, and, after kissing my hand, he returned to the unknown woman. The unknown woman — she was no longer that. She had turned round to see the person whom the Baron d'Hauterive knew, and, as her veil was slightly raised, I recognised the mouth of the Marquise de Mauriones, that sensual and refined mouth, the shape of which had struck me as so beautiful and rare. I left the shop first and returned to my room, deeply troubled. My morning's pleasure was quite spoiled. Could that really be the woman whom Guy had loved for two years? Perhaps he had merely accompanied her out of politeness? No, I had felt the magnetic sensation of love.

Without my encouraging him, my godson, since godson he is to be, often comes now to dinner to the Hôtel de Castiglione. This evening when he sent up his name I awaited him in great anxiety, for I was resolved not to let this opportunity slip by of knowing the truth. When he arrived, there was a moment's embarrassment between us. He looked at me with a questioning expression, and I tried to appear indifferent.

"And so you, too, are a customer at my shop," I said, when we were at table.

"An old customer even," he answered. "I have done a great deal of shopping there. Mother bought all her writing-paper there. You might have met each other in that shop."

Colette and I might have met in that shop! It made me shiver to think of it. Providence had arranged things with more mercy, and I offered up my thanks mentally.

"Was that not the Marquise de Mauriones with you this morning?" I asked, in the most natural way.

"Do you know her?" exclaimed my god-son, with

an expression that betrayed astonishment and sudden anxiety.

"I have seen her from time to time at the Ritz. To tell the truth, I have only known her name the last two days."

"And what do you think of her?"

"She is dangerously beautiful."

A flame leapt in the young man's eyes. He at once lowered his eyelids, as though to hide from me his pride as a happy lover.

"She is divorced, is she not?" I began again.

"Yes, her husband, Duc de Longwy, was a bad lot."

"How does she get the name and title of Marquise de Mauriones?"

"They belonged to her family."

"Is she rich?"

"I suppose so, she lives in good style."

"What a false position she must be in."

"Yes, it is really cruel."

"Oh, she cannot be short of people to console her."

At this commonplace remark, uttered without any mean intention, Guy's expression changed suddenly, and in such a way that I was struck by it.

"No, she certainly is not short of such people," he said in a hoarse voice.

I know now. She it certainly is whom he loves. I could only repeat, "God help him!" And Colette had asked me to arrange a marriage for him!

*Paris.*

"What do you think of the American colony?" "What is thought of it in Paris?" Jean Noël has not been asked any questions as often as these by interviewers. He has always refused to answer, fearing

lest his words should be perverted in order to pander to a crowd of petty spites. The feminine American colony of Europe is treated in New York with a severity it does not deserve, and envy accounts in a great measure for this. That would be denied, of course, and I should be answered that when people have wealth and position in their own country they cannot very well envy the uprooted ones. Well, these uprooted ones, who are nobodies "at home," and whom no one cares to know, acquire a certain prestige by their sojourn in Europe, by their contact with the society of the Old World, a contact singularly exaggerated, too, in the "Society Echoes," and people in America are jealous of them. When foreigners put in the same category all members of the American colony, it is through ignorance, but when their own country people do it, it is through injustice. In Paris there are three distinct groups: the cosmopolitan American women, the real American women, and the American women who come to Paris in search of higher artistic or intellectual culture. The first group is composed of wealthy *parvenues,* among whom are a number of deserters from marriage, of grass widows, of divorced women whose one aim is to succeed in becoming members of the aristocratic clan, less out of snobbishness than for the sake of having the revenge on the ostracism shown to them by society in their own country. The question is, have they obtained foothold in the Faubourg St. Germain? No, a thousand times no, not even by marriage. They have only succeeded in believing, and making others believe, that they have "arrived," as we say in Parisian slang. And they alone know what intrigues and money it has cost them to produce this illusion. One of them, for instance, believes that she has a "royalist *salon.*" She would close her doors to the

President of the Republic for fear of compromising herself. Another one is fully persuaded that she has a "mixed *salon*," a *salon* where everyone meets. None of them have any idea that the creation of such social centres requires years and special qualities, forces which could not be bought for money. They do not know it, and it is this which appeases me. They are evolving amongst us, without understanding us, without getting any nearer to us by a single thought or sentiment. They are navigating in our waters, without suspecting the depth of these. They heap up blunders upon blunders, and continue to float on the surface where Frenchwomen would perish. They are always going ahead, only conscious of the power which wealth gives them, trying their golden key in the best guarded doors. Many doors resist, but they do not talk of these. They will not, any more than so many children, do any harm to any one. What mission are they accomplishing? Of what use is this superficial contact with the Old World? My eyes are not yet strong enough to see this, but Nature has not brought it about in vain.

The real American women belong generally to what the Yankees call "our best class." Their husbands have felt the need of retiring from the conflict of business; they themselves prefer Paris, where life is less "rapid" than in their own country, where they can escape from the terrible emulation which, in the United States, strands so many women. They do not seek to get into French society, but keep strictly to themselves. Most of them have very beautiful homes, and live in a luxurious style that is restful and in good taste. Nearly all of them have created for themselves some special interest in life. One goes in for music, another for painting, and besides this they do a great

deal of good. By the side of these two worldly clans there is the group of artists. They interest and amaze me, these creatures whom a spark of electricity has separated from their own people. Whilst all around them business and dollars were being discussed, their ears were trying to catch chords and harmonies, their eyes were fascinated by colour and line. Across the enormous distance, they felt the attraction of old Europe. In spite of the deafening noise of machinery, they heard its call, and at the price of a thousand sacrifices they answered it. Their growing number has necessitated certain institutions, among others that of a "Home Club." This is installed, if you please, in the old Chevreuse mansion, a house with a carriage gateway, a garden, a terrace with wrought-iron balustrade, a roof with pretty attic rooms. Providence has been kind to them, these transatlantic bees. Every day at five o'clock, tea is served at this club, and American women of the Bohemian order assemble there. Oh, what droll girls, and what an untamed look one sees in their eyes! They arrive with their violins, their sketching folios, or their books. They wear dresses that are too short, hats that are not fresh-looking, jackets that are too thin, and their faces are drawn by privations. The piles of bread-and-butter placed before them quickly disappear. It is most touching to see these grasshoppers coming to warm themselves and take shelter, for an instant, under the starry banner of their mother-country. Some of them have been brought here from long distances, from the Far West, even. What are they to do here? They are, no doubt, intended to come into touch with the great accumulators of art which we possess, to see beauty, hear harmony, and then produce these in their turn. Very few of them, alas, will succeed in this. It requires many paint-

ers in order to produce one painter, and many musicians for producing one musician.

Paris likes the American woman, not only because she leaves it her money (as it is conscious of giving her in exchange for that, things that are infinitely more valuable), but because she is pretty, well-made, and sets off its creations wonderfully well. Paris likes her because her brilliant beauty brightens its streets and theatres. She is like one more flower in its wreath. The shop-people appreciate this astonishing woman who does as she likes with her money, who only consults her own fancy, and who, when once the price is agreed upon, pays her bills without deducting the coppers. The action of American women on our habits and customs, although superficial, is none the less obvious. Following their example we lunch in hats. Under their inspiration the feminine toilet has become less discreet, the taste for jewellery has developed, the luxury of the thousand accessories of life has increased, comfort also. Bath-rooms have been multiplied, hotels transformed. Only a dozen years ago dining-room tables were bare-looking. I remember seeing American women bring in bunches of violets and roses to enliven their meals. Influenced by this happy suggestion, hotel-keepers have begun decorating "the travellers' table"; I therefore owe to them the pretty bouquet which now delights my eyes at luncheon and at dinner. The American quarter, in the neighbourhood of the Etoile, looks different from other parts. The Saxon-Protestant soul makes itself felt there. The whole district is elegant, formal and cold. The Faubourg St. Germain is infinitely warmer and more congenial. When one goes from the Rue de Varennes to the Place des Etats Unis, it is like passing from the Old World into the New World.

It was my conversation with Guy, this evening, that led me to write all this. He was with me when a note was brought from one of my American friends inviting me prettily to a "hen-dinner."

"A 'hen-dinner'!" he exclaimed, smiling. "You won't accept, I hope!"

"Why, yes."

"Do you mean to say that you would resign yourself to hearing scandal and *chiffons* talked the whole evening?"

"But I am not sure that the entertainment will be limited to that. Miss X— will carefully select her countrywomen, in order to give me a pleasant impression."

"You have too good an opinion of American women. Believe me, they are humbugs. Most of them come to Europe ostensibly for their health, or for the education of their children; in reality to amuse themselves in the masculine sense of the word. With us it is the men who amuse themselves; in the United States it is the women. Poor Yankees!"

"Don't pity them, my dear boy. One of them made this magnificent speech to me one day: 'In our country all the laws are in favour of women, and it is we, the men, who made those laws.' 'In France,' I added, 'all the laws are against women, and it is you, the men, who have made them.'"

"That is so, and I am not exactly proud of it," answered my god-son. "But the magnanimity of the American men is not calculated to encourage us. They have been badly enough rewarded, you must agree. You have flattered the Transatlantics in your novels, god-mother. I have not found in them that respect for truth which you attribute to them. They tell you stories which send you to sleep. According to them,

their daughters have refused the greatest names in the *Almanac de Gotha*, the Faubourg St. Germain has no secrets for them. One of my friends visits an American woman who goes in for social electicisms, and wants to bring about the coalition of parties by means of music. You can imagine what that is! She had in her salon, one day, not a bouquet, but a bush of rare flowers! Georges Sérizay began to tease her about them. She told him that they were an offering from the Republican party, and added, 'When my friend, Count C—, saw the card which accompanied them, he tore it up, saying, 'This is a royalist salon!' Isn't that comic?"

"Comic." I exclaimed, laughing heartily. "It is killing. I hope the anecdote is true!"

"True? I guarantee it. That's just like *parvenus*. They want to climb the social ladder four steps at a time and to live quickly, very, very quickly. They haven't time to wait for events to happen, they invent them. You don't know the real American women."

"Possibly not."

"A 'hen-dinner!'" repeated Guy, picking up the invitation. "I think I shall do well to fetch you away at ten o'clock."

"Oh, there is no need to come for me," I said promptly. "Miss X— lives in the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne, and I am quite used to coming home alone."

"That was all right when you had no one; but now you are under my immediate protection. At ten o'clock I shall come and release you."

"Anyhow, not at ten o'clock, if you please."

"At eleven, then."

"Yes, let it be eleven, then," I said, both irritated and pleased.

*Paris.*

The famous "hen-dinner" took place yesterday, and was a thorough success from every point of view. Miss X— lives with her father in a flat in the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne, in which elegance, art and comfort are happily combined. The dining-room had a particularly brilliant aspect. We were ten, round a table covered with an embroidered cloth, which had, as its centre-piece, a basket of superb fruit, and was strewn as if by hazard with roses of various species. We seemed to be eating in the midst of flowers. Each guest was in full dress, and had put on her "war-paint" as though for masculine conquest. The American woman, as a matter of fact, dresses for woman more than for man. Our amphitryon wore a dress of lace and silk muslin of a warm-white, and round her neck she had a high pearl collar. In my quality of dowager, she placed me opposite her. I was, of course, the only Frenchwoman there. Miss X— had gathered together girls and also women of thirty and forty. My neighbour was a Baltimore beauty, married and living at Washington, very tall, with fair hair and complexion. She had small features and immense eyes of dark blue, shaded by lashes that looked like those of a child. It was a real pleasure to look at her. All these women were rich, absolutely independent, although nominally under the control of parents or husbands. Each of them had an object in life, an ambition or an occupation. One of them, who was introduced to me as Dr. V—, is house-surgeon in one of the large Boston hospitals. From her gentle face and timid expression I should never have guessed her vocation, and expressed my astonishment.

"I inherited this taste from my father, who was not able himself to study," she replied simply. "I love art and society, but my profession above everything."

In spite of myself, during dinner, my eyes were attracted by this woman's delicate, long, thin hands which handled the knife and lancet. The sight of them gave me little shivers down my back. Paris supplied unlimited material for conversation. Among the guests, some had visited all the Montmartre establishments, had been to supper in all the night restaurants; the others had been fascinated with the Latin Quarter and had dined in its taverns, an indication of mentality. The French little think what prestige the Latin Quarter still has for foreigners, who neither understand its lower nor its higher life, but are fascinated by its ebullition of youth and forces. In the window of Galignani's English library there is always a row of books, among which that magic title flares out. On hearing the various impressions that Paris calls forth, I realised that, alone of all the capitals of Europe, it is a complete orchestra, an orchestra which has a sound for each human ear. I asked my neighbour, the most beautiful of the "hens" present, if she were amusing herself here.

"No, I am resting here. That is much better."

"You are resting in Paris?"

"Certainly. I come here with my maid and my dog. When I arrive, I am so tired of Society life that I hope never to see my husband, my house and my pictures again. After a little time my nerves recover, and I return home with pleasure."

"And Mr. H.— gives you holidays like this?"

"Oh, our men are so good!"

I should have liked Guy to hear this speech.

"In what way do you rest?" I asked, inquisitively.

"I have a singing-lesson every day, I take Loulou out for a walk, I go to the theatre, to all the concerts, I call on the old French ladies whose sons have been *attachés* at Washington. They are terribly shocked at my in-

dependence. They have the greatest difficulty in thinking me all right, but they like to see me, and to please them I put on my very prettiest frocks. This morning I lunched with one of them, and we were waited on by a man-servant in a white apron. It was delightful!"

A man-servant in a white apron, delightful! How one must have been surfeited with luxury to have this impression!

"I am not surprised that the French cannot understand you," I said, smiling.

"But they do not even try to do so," said our hostess, "and that is what maddens me. All those I have met out, for the last twelve years, have asked me the same questions: 'Do you like Paris? Have you been away from America long?' Not one of them has gone beyond that. I have tried to talk art or literature; they have looked at me with astonishment, and have never attempted to continue the conversation."

"Have you had the same experience?" I asked an American woman, who owns a *château* not far from Paris.

"Exactly. It took me a long time to become intimate with my neighbours. There is one thing that never ceases to astonish them, that is my individual liberty in married life."

"How behind the times they must seem to you!"

"Yes and no. They have shades and a delicacy that we have not acquired. This autumn I spent three months in Boston, and my compatriots seemed to me terribly raw."

"Don't say that before Madame de Myères," exclaimed Miss V—. "It is treason."

"Not at all," I said, smiling. "Do I not know that Nature refuses to hurry up. You have refinement, but not its niceties. With us, raw people are generally coarse."

"How just you are!" said the "beauty," with a pleased look.

"I try to be."

"That is why we are not afraid of you," added our hostess.

With these amiable words she made me the conventional sign, and we rose from the table and went into the drawing-room. We sat down there round the fire. Coffee was brought in, and a few cigarettes were lighted. It was as though the Buddhist gods and goddesses of the admirable collection in the adjoining room had influenced our minds in an occult way, for the conversation gradually turned to India, China and Japan. A crowd of anecdotes and reminiscences surged up from these fresh memories.

"What a contrast between a city like Benares and New York!" I said. "That is an impression that I envy you."

"It is not as striking as you imagine it to be," replied Madame B—. "It is too much toned down by the presence of foreigners. What is most extraordinary is the revelation of that psychical force which, immaterial and invisible, sustains millions of individuals, and communicates to them a power of endurance superior to our own. All the time, in the midst of the real and unreal, I had the sensation that India was a soul upon which we were walking."

"And upon which the English play tennis and golf."

"Yes, and it is abominable; you cannot imagine how vulgar we seem by the side of these poor Hindoos who live in the Beyond. I was invited to a tea ceremony at the house of a native lady. There were endless bows, compliments and changing of cups. It was as though the movements were timed by music. I could not understand anything, but all the time I was thinking of our

Society teas, our chatter, our abrupt gestures, and the comparison was not to our advantage. I should have liked to go back to India this year, but I belong to a certain committee, so must go home. It means work. Miss Gould, our President, sets the example herself."

"I would give a great deal to be present at the meetings of a committee of women," I said, laughing.

"Oh, I will not say that they are always dignified. We quarrel, and give each other vicious little stabs; but we come to an understanding finally, and with good results. For instance, formerly, in the eyes of the whole world our Chicago was only a pig-market. The women took it into their heads to show that it was capable of appreciating works of art, and even of producing them. They seized the opportunity of its exhibition. Thanks to them there were, by the side of the display of its material power, oases of beauty and poetry. The initial movement, once given, has not slackened. In Chicago now, music is cultivated with passion, pictures are collected, taste is getting more and more refined, and it will not be long before Chicago eclipses New York. That is what *we* have accomplished."

"You ought to be grateful to the men who have given you the necessary liberty."

"Oh, our American men are too clever and too practical not to know that their big paws are not suitable for certain work. They leave it to us willingly. In the twentieth century woman cannot belong solely to husband and child. Civilisation claims her. She has acquired the right of working for the progress of this world."

At this moment my eyes were magnetically attracted towards the next room. A ray of electricity was thrown upon a Buddhist goddess, giving her a semblance of life. A mysterious smile gleamed from between her half-closed eyelids, descended to her lips, and I saw that

she had numerous arms. Irresistibly attracted, I went towards her, took her up with reverence, and brought her with me into the midst of our circle.

"You see," I then said, "the future power of woman seems to have formed part of the Buddhist dream. Here is a goddess with four heads, and at least a dozen arms!"

"Twenty-four, if you please," rectified Miss X— "It is Kwan-Gin, and her name means 'She who listens to the sounds of earth and lends her ear to the words of men.' She is adored in China and Japan like an 'Our Lady of Pity' here."

The American women rose, gathered round the bronze statue and stroked it one after the other.

"She's holding a thunderbolt," exclaimed one.

"The goblet of sacrifice!"

"The wooden bowl for the almsgiving!"

"The book of the law!"

"The prayer-wheel!"

"The Wheel of Things!"

"Come, now," I said, smiling, "that's enough to satisfy the most feminine of us. 'She who listens to the sound of earth' must have heard our voices."

As I was putting Kwan-Gin gently back on her pedestal eleven o'clock struck. The evening had passed incredibly quickly. These American women, away from the magnetic influence of man, had been amusing, original and charming. I said so to our hostess.

"Yes," she replied, "our cackling has not been dull."

"On the contrary, it has been brilliant; let us congratulate ourselves."

"Let us congratulate ourselves," they repeated gaily.

My carriage was announced, and in the hall I found Louis, Guy's servant man. I could not help smiling. Would any one believe it possible that I felt a sort of vain satisfaction? It is rather humiliating to own it.

My godson had done things well, for he was waiting for me in a carriage from his club.

"Well, god-mother," he asked at once, "did you not regret that I was not here earlier?"

"Not at all; I have not enjoyed myself so much for a long time. And I can assure you that we have not said any harm of a single person, and we have not talked *chiffons*."

"Ah, indeed!"

"Several times I wished that you were hidden behind one of the screens. If you had heard us you would have had a better opinion of women."

The young man laughed nervously.

"A better opinion of women! That's exactly what I need to have at this moment."

"Have you a bad one, then."

"Yes, yes; but no matter," he said brusquely.

I refrained from insisting, and there was silence between us. The Avenue du Bois de Boulogne was deserted, and the night cold and rainy. I gradually began to feel, as I used to do with my husband, a delicious sensation of security, of moral and physical warmth. Was it not he who was giving it me again, or at least the something of him that still exists? Instinctively I turned towards my companion, and, meeting his eyes, I saw in them that gleam which I always see, the gleam that came from his father's soul. It touched me more directly than it had ever done, and I felt very happy. I remembered our returns from balls and theatres, the joy of reaching home again. I saw again our little drawing-room, enlivened by a beautiful wood fire, and the dainty supper which awaited us. . . .

Suddenly overcome, I lowered the window, and was deeply moved by what I saw. To avoid the slippery pavement of the Champs Elysées, the coachman had

turned off to the right, and we were now driving along the Rue François I. The carriage crossed the square and turned the corner slowly. I could not breathe, and was foolish enough to say to myself, "What if this were an evil dream — supposing it were to stop there, in front of the house!" — No, I was not dreaming; the carriage drove on and took me — to the hotel. Oh, Providence, too, puts delicate shades into its novels!

*Paris.*

It is very curious and rather disquieting, but for the last few days I have met Madame de Mauriones everywhere. She crosses my path, I cross hers, we exchange a glance and pass on. I know Life well enough now to be aware that these meetings of individuals are never casual, but that they frequently prepare events. Are we to become acquainted, and, if so, why and how?

The day before yesterday I witnessed a scene which disturbed my mind in the most singular way. Some American friends took me to the Hôtel Ritz to dinner. The assembly was large and elegant. In the white framework of the restaurant, the tables, decorated with flowers, at which women in evening dress were seated, had the prettiest effect. The brilliancy of eyes, of smiles, and of red lips, the play of hands covered with diamonds, and the glitter of jewels, gave to the atmosphere a sort of joyous life. Not far from me I suddenly caught sight of the Marquise de Mauriones. "There she is again!" I thought. Together with two pretty women, accompanied by their husbands, she was the guest of Prince K—, a Russian who is spending his fortune gallantly in Paris. From my seat I could see the outlines of her bust, the passionate and yet sad expression of her face. She was all in black, and her dress was of some light texture, trimmed with ribbon

velvet. The under bodice was cut very low, showing, through the high-necked gauze, her shoulders and bosom. Her hat, which was also black, suited her profile and hair to perfection. Several rows of flawless pearls relieved the simplicity of her toilette. I looked at the prince with some curiosity. He was still young, with a body rendered heavy and shapeless by good living. His features were regular, but bloated by excesses of all kinds. I had only seen him hitherto in the distance, and was surprised at the refined and caustic expression of his face. This poor rake knows, I am sure, how far to count on the sincerity of the praise heaped on him, and he knows, too, how much his parasites are worth. I at once had the intuition that there was something between him and Madame de Mauriones. He was admiring her openly and trying to monopolise her. She defended herself with a certain haughtiness, avoided his gaze, kept her head obstinately turned towards her right-hand neighbour, looking back again towards him with that slow smile of irresistible fascination peculiar to her. At the end of dinner, both of them, with an almost religious gesture, raised their champagne glass simultaneously. For a few seconds, looking into each other's eyes, they held it to their lips, as though for a communion of love. Then brusquely, without drinking, and with a little wicked laugh, the Marquise put her glass down again. Prince K— turned pale, drank his champagne at one draught and stood up. His guests, rather startled, taking this for the signal of departure, followed his example, and all four left the restaurant. The scene had been well played out, and what a fine scene! There had been a physiological and psychological struggle that was both intense and poignant. It was not a mere flirtation. Was Guy to be betrayed? This idea caused me a sudden joy, of which I was ashamed. The son of my hus-

band betrayed! Such retribution probably satisfied my feminine soul. That handsome boy, with his limpid eyes beaming with manly and healthy youth, was to be betrayed for this shapeless rake. Impossible! Alas, do I not know that everything is possible!

*Paris.*

I have just returned to the hotel after an absence of six days and, during those six days, marvellous things have been accomplished within me. Jean Noël, who fancied himself very learned in psychology, had no idea of what the human soul is capable. Last Monday, as I was finishing luncheon, I was called to the telephone. It was my god-son's manservant. In a distressed voice he begged me to come and help him. The Baron, he said, was alarmingly feverish, did not recognise him, and appeared to be very ill. Deeply affected by the strange news, I answered that I would go there at once. "Madame de Mauriones!" I thought, as I hung up the telephone receiver. I arrived, in a very excited state, at the Rue d'Aguesseau. Louis' face did not reassure me. I asked him what had happened to his master.

"God knows!" he said, lifting his arms. "There is certainly a love affair at the bottom of it. Madame knows what young men are. If women will make a handsome young man like Monsieur Guy miserable, what can all the others expect?"

I could not help smiling.

"For some time," continued the worthy man, "Monsieur has been in a queer way. For the last three days he has not been to Grignon, he's done nothing but go in and out, and pace up and down in the flat. Yesterday, when I asked him whether he was dining at home, he looked at me as though he did not understand, and then gave a nod. I prepared him a nice little dinner, and

he tried to do honour to it, but I saw very well that it wouldn't go down. He complained of a bad headache. I made him some lime-leaf tea, and then he sent me away, saying he did not want anything else, and that he should go to bed early. This morning he did not hear me go into his room, and, thinking that he was sleeping naturally, I would not wake him. At twelve o'clock I went back to him, I called and called, but he only answered by groans; it's as though he cannot open his eyes. Madame will see for herself."

I went to his room and found him in his Empire bed. He was quite inert, and looked as though he were dead. His pulse was slow, irregular, languid; his breathing rapid, his eyes fixed, and he appeared to be plunged in a semi-coma. I was very much alarmed.

"Quick, quick to the telephone," I said to Louis. "Ask for Dr. H—."

Fortunately this doctor was at home and, after begging him to come immediately, I returned to Guy.

Forces that we do not see, jealousy, treachery, perhaps had laid this vigorous body low. As I stood looking at this poor vanquished one, I was very much moved, tears dimmed my sight, and, beneath my heart, in that sacred region which is the tabernacle of maternity, a region hitherto sterile and silent within me, I suddenly felt a curious tenderness born, a tenderness that was new and infinitely sweet. Guy moved about and groaned.

"Mother — mother!" he called, with an accent of pitiful distress.

And I, unconsciously, replied —

"My child — my dear child!"

I put my hand on his head to bless him, to adopt or soothe him — I cannot tell what. The maternal instinct had just been roused in the depth of my being. It had triumphed over all paltry sentiments, over my woman's

spite, and I repeated once more, with intense joy, "My child — my dear child!"

I was ready to second Nature and Science with all the forces of my intelligence and my heart. Was it not this that Providence wanted?

The doctor arrived at full speed, as I had asked him. On seeing me so anxious at the bedside of this young man, his face betrayed some surprise, and I blushed! At my age it was too ridiculous.

"Baron d'Hauterive is a relative of mine," I then said.

For the first time I realised that my husband's son was my second cousin.

At the first glance the doctor judged the case serious.

"Brain fever," he said, "and it will give us some trouble. A shock, I suppose, or overwork?"

"A shock more probably."

He took the patient's temperature.

"One hundred and four," he announced, "and it will not stop there. Who is going to nurse him?"

"His valet and I. The man is very devoted to him."

"That is not enough. You must have an experienced nurse. I know an English one who is free. Shall I telephone to her to come?"

"Do all that you think necessary, and save him for me!" I said, unconscious at the time of the strangeness of this speech.

"We will try, we will try," answered the doctor, with a look, the inquisitiveness of which I can still feel.

In less than an hour everything was organised and the rescue of the poor boy began. And what a rescue! A long and trying one. Doctor H—, the nurse, Uncle Georges, Louis and I all worked with a will. For three days Guy was in extreme danger. Ice on his head, baths, subcutaneous injections seemed powerless to reduce his

temperature. It even went up to one hundred and six. I had the horrible impression that his brain was under some very heavy weight which would crush him to death. The doctor spoke of an operation. I sat with him from midnight to six, and then again from one to six. I know now something of the force which makes mothers so brave at the bedside of their children. I felt an exquisite joy in procuring a little relief for my invalid. I had the magnetic consciousness that through the darkness he felt my presence, and that I did him good. I tried eagerly to seize the incoherent words of his delirium, in order to guess what could have caused this horrible collapse. He often called his mother, and then his god-mother, and that made me very happy. The name of Anne came constantly to his lips. He asked for millions, for money, much money! He saw black foxes on the walls of his room; he beat the air with his arms to chase them away. After these moments of excitement, he had fits of sudden drowsiness which terrified me still more. During the third night I thought he was falling into a mortal coma, and, according to the doctor's orders, I gave him injections of *caféine*. Towards morning he opened his eyes, a sort of smile passed over his lips, he gave a long sigh, and then his eyes closed again. I thought he was dead. I bent over him in fearful anguish. His breathing had not ceased, it became regular and gentle. I had an idea that a change had just taken place, and went to fetch the nurse. She examined the patient. Her face brightened with a gleam that seemed to me divine; she put her hand on mine and pressed it warmly.

"I think he is saved now," she said to me very quietly.

And he was saved.

When he recovered consciousness, he did not look astonished to see me with him.

"Have you nursed me, god-mother?" he asked gently.

I nodded.

"Have I been very ill?"

"Ill enough for me to have sent for Uncle Georges and to have frightened me terribly."

Memory returned to him, no doubt, for the colour came into his face, and he did not utter a word. After the scene I had witnessed at the Ritz, I did not doubt but that the blow had come from Madame de Mauriones. How had he learnt about her *liaison* or flirtation with Prince K—? And those millions which seemed to torture him? And the black foxes? Black foxes! This vision would not have surprised me in the brain of an inebriate, but in the brain of a lover I could not explain it. Jean Noël would have liked to know. I watched with great admiration the clearing of the faculties of "my child," the marvellous process of recovery. I said to myself that everything is beautiful in Life, even illness, even what we call death. The only thing is, we do not yet know how to look at such things in their proper light. In the meantime, Nature and Youth are at work repairing the physical ravages in Guy's constitution. As to the moral ravage, I have not yet been able to judge of that.

*Paris.*

On returning to my hotel, I found a magnificent bouquet from the Lussons. I had at once sent them word about the illness of my relative. Guy, my relative! How droll it is! They shared my anxiety with the most affectionate interest. Several times a day they asked for news by telephone. The telephone is a terrible revealer of secrets. It gives you the true character of people in the intonations it brings to you. I can judge a friend or a woman when I hear their voice through the telephone. Josée de Lusson's came to me warm, gay and kind. I did not catch a single harsh or

false note in it. If I were a man, I would marry her on the strength of her voice!

Among the letters which were waiting for me there was one from Sir William Randolph. He is spending the winter at Torquay, which he finds dreadfully English. His physical suffering is betrayed by an increase of humour. He has written, on the margins of the *Revue de France*, the criticisms and reflections which my novel suggested to him. "I found in it," he says, "a number of thoughts that were comforting, oxygenised. Oxygen has become my idea of all that is good, you know. At times I was tempted to believe that those thoughts were written for that poor Englishman you met at Cannes, and that they were messages. That would be very fine, but would it not be a great honour both for Jean Noël and for me?"

What pleasure those words gave me! Very much honour for Jean Noël? Evidently, and I am conscious of it. Oh, it is working, my accumulator!

*Paris.*

This feeling of maternity continues. I was afraid that it would pass away with the danger which had given birth to it, but it is always there, clinging to my very heart. I look upon it as a recompense, it seems to me that it has renewed my blood and my life, that it has made me younger. Guy is far from well. He has relapses of fever, followed by complete prostration. The doctor says that he will not be himself for another week. Uncle Georges, the nurse and Louis tend him admirably. I go and spend all the afternoon with him. The expression of pleasure that my presence brings to his face, his grateful kiss on my hand, go straight to my heart. I take him flowers, I shake his pillows, stroke them as Colette did; I tempt his appetite with one thing or an-

other, and it is all very delightful. In calling him "my child," this son of Madame d'Hauterive and my husband, I experience an enjoyment which is certainly very complex, but of which I never tire. I sit near him and, whilst crocheting my mufflers, the only feminine work which does not exasperate me, I tell him the news of the day. I do my best to interest him. When I succeed in this I am satisfied. He is crushed morally by the humiliation that infidelity always inflicts on man and woman. We can console ourselves for the loss of the being we love the most, but we cannot reconcile ourselves to the idea of having been deceived. This is an insult which penetrates to the most sacred depths of our being. At times the memory of this insult brings a deep colour to Guy's face. Ah, I know it so well — how it makes the face burn! He looks away from me, so that I shall not see his wound. I can no longer meet his gaze. I have forbidden Louis to give him his correspondence. He has not asked for it, either. Among the letters there are three, I am sure, from Madame de Mauriones. The envelopes are of an elegant shape, the paper slightly tinted; the large Gothic handwriting seems to me characteristic of the woman she must be. If only she does not get him back! Reconciliations are always demoralising. For these youthful passions a violent, unlingering death is better. There is in Guy an innate dignity which reassures me. To-day I was watching him while he slept. When his eyes are closed he has exactly the energetic expression of Colette's grandfather, of all the Nolays. Nature went there to fetch this vein of force that she required, disdaining me and my rights. It will help him to get the upper hand, and later on, what will it produce?

"A great deal of good, I hope," I murmured inwardly.

A little shiver of cold or pain made me go to the fire.

I stood there warming myself, my gaze fixed on the flame, my head slightly bent. When I raised it I was thunderstruck, literally hypnotised. In the glass the face of my husband had just appeared; for a few seconds I did not realise that it was a photograph; I had the impression of a vision, and I did not dare to breathe for fear that it should vanish. This portrait, which I had dreaded and yet wished to see in Guy's room, was partially hidden by the automobile bottle-case that Louis had put in front of it. I seized it with trembling hands. For sixteen years I had not seen that face, except in my own mind! I gazed at it eagerly, with an emotion which, starting from the heart, spread like a warm wave through all my being. This photograph, which I did not know, must have been taken during the last month of my husband's life. The light had seized and revealed what no one then saw — approaching death. It was there in the thinness and the pallor of the ear, in the hollow of the temples, on the under lip. Between the two eyebrows there was a furrow of suffering. All that had escaped me! The flood of affection, held back so long, overflowed at last, and through beneficent, purifying tears I repeated, "My beloved, my poor beloved!" I tenderly replaced the portrait of my husband, and then, half turning round, my eyes rested on his son, still asleep, and I was glad to have him, yes glad! Was it this, then, that the enigmatic smile of pity and love, which I had seen on his lips after death, was promising me! Did not that smile mean, "A great joy will spring out of your present grief. Let Providence work in its own way." His soul, perhaps, knew all!

*Paris.*

Guy is quite convalescent. He has left his bed for the sofa, and walked round the room a few times, resting on

my arm. He tries to read. He is interested in the double dummy bridge which I play with Uncle Georges, and he keeps our scores. To-day I allowed him to see his correspondence. I took it to him myself. The truth is that Jean Noël was curious to observe the effect of the three feminine letters. On seeing them he became very pale; he was expecting them and wishing for them, no doubt, but, thanks to human perversity, they immediately provoked his contempt and anger. With dilated nostrils and set jaw he tore them into two, and then four, with a snort of painful pleasure which I very well divined, and threw them into the fire. I watched them burn. The paper, the little black letters flamed up, but not the thoughts! Those thoughts which were not doomed to arrive at their destination, what became of them? The idea struck me that, like vain resolutions, fruitless impulses, aborted plans, they were the sparks of Life's hearth, that they would be decomposed and, perhaps, recomposed, and would not be lost.

"From Robert," said Guy, opening an envelope with his still trembling fingers. His expression softened on reading the affectionate lines from his brother. Another letter appeared to give him pleasure.

"From Dawson City, god-mother, from the land of gold!" he said, holding it out to me; "this will interest you."

"Do you know some one, then, out there?"

"Yes, one of my best friends is there, that is, if there are any good friends — Max Rennes."

"Max Rennes!" I exclaimed, "but that is the miner who sent a 'Bravo!' from Klondyke to Jean Noël, after reading her second novel."

"I am not surprised at that; he has an enthusiastic young soul and a bold and adventurous nature, he is a Frenchman of the old type. He maintains that the

auriferous wealth of Alaska surpasses all imagination. He is in despair at seeing it exploited by foreign, not French, companies. He invites me to go and join him in the Klondyke. He wants me to judge for myself, so that I may make it known at home. I shall go! Oh yes, I shall certainly go! A gold-digger! If I had known Life better I should have commenced as that."

I immediately felt a pang at my heart. My new maternity is no laughing matter, it appears.

"It seems to me that you have money enough to be happy," I said.

The young man burst into laughter that was painful to hear.

"You think so! But everything is so extravagantly dear, god-mother. Love, illusions, happiness!"

"Guy, Guy! Is it really you talking like this?"

He rose and paced up and down the room.

"Yes," he said, "it is I, with experience and knowledge of men and women. What truth there is in the fable that teaches us that we can have everything for a little gold-dust? No matter! I shall go and fetch some from out yonder! I will dig shafts, and with such energy that the very ice will melt with it! I shall make a splendid miner. *En route* for Alaska!"

With these wild words my god-son threw himself down on the sofa, patches of colour on his face, and his eyes brilliant. I went and sat down near him.

"I am sure, anyhow, that if you find gold you will use it well," I said, with the intention of pacifying him.

"One cannot be sure of anything, nor of any one," he replied in a cutting tone.

"You cannot be sure of Uncle Georges nor of me, for instance?"

His face softened instantly.

"Forgive me," he said, half rising. "I am a brute."

Then, in a low, suppressed voice, he continued: "You do not know how treachery hurts, how it maddens one."

"I do know! Oh, I do know!" I said, forcing myself to smile.

"You."

I nodded. He looked at me in an astonished way, and I felt myself blush at the pity that came into his eyes. Oh, that blush of humiliation that always comes still!

"Poor god-mother!" he said gently, and taking my hand, he raised it to his lips with such tenderness and respect that I was very happy and even rather proud.

"You see," I said, "trials of this sort resemble the tempering process. The soul, after a high temperature, is suddenly cooled by grief, and thus acquires superior force. A few days ago you were still a child —"

"A child! Say, rather, an imbecile, an idiot!"

"No, a child. To-day you are a man. In my opinion, the being who has not suffered has no value."

My god-son laughed nervously.

"Then I shall have great value, for I have suffered very much, god-mother," he said simply.

I begin to think that money has something to do with the affair that brought Guy to death's door. With a mercenary woman it would be comprehensible, but the Marquise de Mauriones! Perhaps he wanted to marry her, and she preferred Prince K— to him.

I expected a great deal from the firmness of my god-son, but I did not expect so much. To-day I left him asleep on the sofa in his room, and I was alone in the *salon* working near the window. Louis entered, looking mysterious and upset.

"There is a person here who wishes to speak to madame," he said.

"Who is the person?"

"A lady." Then, rolling up the corner of his apron and colouring, the good fellow added, "It would, perhaps, be better for Monsieur Guy not to see her."

I guessed at once who the visitor was.

"Certainly," I replied. "I will see her. Where is she?"

"In the library."

"Good."

I went towards the adjoining room, feeling a little disturbed in my mind. A woman was standing waiting for me. A long mantle partially concealed her figure, a very thick-spotted gauze veil hid her features as completely as a mask. On my entrance she raised the veil, and this little act of confidence or audacity pleased me.

"Madame de Mauriones," she said simply.

I bowed and pointed to an arm-chair.

"Monsieur d'Hauterive — is out of danger — I hope?" she said, in a broken voice which betrayed great emotion. "I heard yesterday that he had had a relapse."

"No, he is as well as possible, but the doctor insists on perfect quiet."

She at once guessed my thought.

"You may be quite sure that I shall not disturb him. It is Jean Noël whom I have come to see, just as one goes to a confessor, without any introduction. Few women, I should think, have been hit more directly than I by your last novel. You know not only the human heart, but Life; you must know that there are some terrible wheels in it from which it is nearly impossible to escape, if merely the hem of one's dress has been caught."

"I know it."

"Well, then, I have come to ask you to make Guy

understand that, so that he may hate me less, for he does hate me, does he not?" she asked in a low voice.

"He has not confided in me, and he will not do so, since there is a woman in the matter."

"You understand, though, that he has had a cruel disappointment?"

"Yes, since he nearly died of it."

A painful colour mounted to the cheeks of Madame de Mauriones; she lowered her eyelids, and when she raised them again her eyes were full of tears.

"That thought adds to my sorrow and to my remorse. I fear above all that it may affect him morally. I should like to know his state of mind. Would it be indiscreet to ask if he has any plan?"

"He seems to be taken with the gold-fever," I said, rather maliciously.

The Marquise turned pale to her lips.

"Ah!" she said, crushing up the little handkerchief which she held in the palm of her hand, a nervous movement, by the bye, which is quite modern.

"He wants to go and join his friend, Max Rennes, at Dawson City."

"Oh, you will not let him! You must prevent him at all costs!" added Madame de Mauriones vehemently.

"I shall do my utmost. He has been forced into my life; it would be painful to me to lose him now."

"You alone can keep him. You have a great deal of influence with him. He often spoke to me of his godmother. He told me how you had come across each other at Bagnoles. You were, perhaps, destined to nurse him and save him."

"Everything is providential."

"In that case, Providence has to answer for very terrible things."

"Things which seem to us terrible, because we know neither the beginning nor the end of them, but probably they are not so."

"Then you believe, as you say, that everything is for the best for every one."

"It seems to me that otherwise the justice of God would not be satisfied."

The young Marquise gave a deep sigh.

At this moment the door opened. The same intuition made us both rise to our feet. Guy! And it was Guy, roused, no doubt, by the presence of Madame de Mauriones, attracted unawares by her. The change in his features, his pallor on seeing her, caused me to move towards him. Believing that I intended to go away, he put his hand on my shoulder to prevent me, and leaned on it in his weakness.

"Stay, god-mother," he said. "Madame de Mauriones and I have nothing to say to each other, nothing."

"Nothing," repeated the Marquise, with a haughty dignity that excited my admiration. "My visit was to Jean Noël."

"I suppose so," answered my god-son coldly. "I regret to have interrupted it," and thereupon he took his hand from my bruised shoulder, bowed, and went out of the room. The woman before me followed him with her eyes, and with her very soul beyond the door. She then fell back against her arm-chair as if all strength had deserted her.

"He is very much changed," she stammered out. "I hope that this fresh emotion will not do him any harm. I was not trying to meet him."

She caught the expression of incredulity on my face, and added —

"You do not believe me? You are right," she said,

with that pale smile peculiar to her. "I had persuaded myself that it was only Jean Noël I had come to see — it was him, too, and I have seen him."

There was such real grief in the expression of her face that, touched with pity, I laid my hand on hers.

"Since you attribute to me a certain knowledge of Life, believe in my experience — these affections outside the home do not produce anything good, and they absorb the best sap of the individual."

"I know it, but am I not doomed to remain outside? Did I not begin by a divorce, by running off the rails?" said the Marquise, with a little nervous laugh.

"Some one or something will put you back on the line. Nature will utilise the great forces she has given to you."

"You think she has given great forces to me? Ah, this time, Jean Noël, your intuition is at fault."

"I think not. It is more than two years now since I noticed you at the Hôtel Ritz. Perhaps I had some foreboding of what was to happen. I was certainly conscious of the individuality which made itself felt in your person. When you appeared, all the interest seemed to be concentrated in you."

"Really! It is very pleasant to hear any good about oneself," said Madame de Mauriones, with pretty frankness.

"Especially when it is said sincerely."

"Thank you."

My visitor rose. She looked at me for some seconds in silence.

"We can never see each other again," she added, with quivering lips; "I feel that, and I regret it with all my heart. Write a great many novels, though, so that at least I may read you."

"No, only one would tempt me now," I said, "it

is the novel of Life, and I shall not have time enough allotted to me for that. Some one else will have that honour."

"The novel of Life," repeated Madame de Mauriones.

"Yes, I should like to show the texture of Life. For instance, take yourself, and consider for a moment all that it has required to bring you here to me in this flat in the Rue d'Auguesseau."

The Marquise reflected, and waves of emotion coloured her face, while astonishment and admiration made her eyes larger.

"It is true," she said at last, "I had never thought of looking at things like that."

"Well, try it. Amuse yourself by following the consequences of a few words, the effect of a meeting. You will be so amazed that you will forget your sorrows. You are too young yet, I fear, for this kind of work. I saw the seed in your mind to-day; it will, perhaps, germinate later on and bear fruit, and your visit to Jean Noël will not have been useless."

"No, and I shall never forget it, you may be sure."

I held out my hand to her, and she pressed it slowly, feelingly. She then turned and looked at the portrait of Guy's mother, drew down her veil, and moved towards the door. Before crossing the threshold she turned round and, in a broken, passionate voice, added —

"Do not let him go away."

I remained under the charm of her warm beauty, her voice, her perfect manners. I know two women now, each bearing the name of Marquise de Mauriones, the one who dined at the Ritz, an artificial and clever coquette, and then the *grande amoureuse* who has just been to see me. Which is the true one? The latter, I believe. Her fear lest Guy should do something rash, and her desire to prevent him, seem to prove this. The

certainty that their rupture is final had made me indulgent. Before leaving the library I raised my eyes instinctively to Colette. It seemed to me that she was smiling, the jealous mother.

I found Guy lying back in an arm-chair by the fire, his hands clasped at the back of his head. He did not ask me a single question, but the whole of the afternoon he watched me eagerly in order to read my impressions. The visit of Madame de Mauriones has, in any case, been balm to the man's vanity. He did not believe for an instant that she came for Jean Noël. This visit has raised him again in his own estimation. In his movements and in the sound of his voice I divined an unconscious joy. We must now beware of the reaction!

*Paris.*

I am tingling with emotion to the very tips of my fingers. I have just been with Guy to the station. He is going with Uncle Georges to Algeria, Tunis and Spain. Only a change of moral and material atmosphere can now complete his cure. I suggested Africa, as I know its charm and salutary effect. If Colette had not charged him with looking after me, he would have gone to Alaska, but he dare not forsake me, and I am secretly delighted. When the train started, bearing him away, I felt the deepest anguish, and, afterwards, when he had quite disappeared, a void that was more painful still. This is the grief that the French mother dreads so much. It is to spare herself this that she keeps her sons with her, that she hinders them from going far away in search of valuable forces. If only she trained herself to bring up her children for society at large, for themselves, she would be better prepared for sacrifice. It seems to me that human

maternity begins with self-forgetfulness, otherwise it would only be animal maternity. Whatever may be said, maternal love is certainly the most selfish of all sentiments. Did I not regret to see that Guy no longer needed my care? His convalescence procured for me a hundred little delicate joys; I should have liked it to be still further prolonged. This last week I have spent the afternoons at the Rue d'Aguesseau with him and Uncle Georges. We have had tea and dined together, read, talked, argued, played bridge. Madame de Myères was thoroughly happy. She found herself once more in her element; Jean Noël was not pleased. He kept pulling her dress all the time. This evening he had a sort of sensation of release. He sat down joyfully to his writing-table, where the first proofs of the novel, which is soon to appear in volume form, awaited him: he turned over the leaves of his manuscript-book on England most tenderly. He once more took possession of Guy's god-mother, and he seems determined not to let her go again.

*Paris.*

Lady Randolph gives me news of Sir William, but, alas! it is not good news. "His vocal cords are so much affected," she writes, "that we can scarcely hear him at all. I have never been his intellectual equal, and I take a melancholy pleasure in feeling that I alone understand him now." Does not that show a good kind of womanliness, that sentiment?

*Paris.*

This afternoon will, perhaps, count for something. What has happened? Only a look. Ever since the month of December my little friend, Josée, has been taking skating lessons. She is passionately fond of this

sport. I expressed a wish to judge of her progress; her mother and she took me to the rink at the *Palais de Glace*. We arrived rather early. Madame de Lusson and I took our seats at one of the tables on the raised circular platform, and Josée went to the cloak-room to have her skates put on. There were not many people there, and I looked with curiosity at the dazzling arena. A feminine figure, dressed entirely in black, rivetted my attention. With her toque trimmed with an aigrette and fur, her hands in her muff, her close-fitting skirt falling in folds lower down, she gave a striking impression of harmony. A thick veil masked her face. Her skating was something better than mere sport, she seemed swayed by an interior rhythm which expressed, in turn, desire, passion, a need of intoxication and of oblivion, and also extreme weariness. And this solitary figure, gliding like a huge night-bird over the white ground, had something sad about it, almost pathetic. Mademoiselle de Lusson, on coming back from the cloak-room, well and duly shod, explored the track at a glance.

"Ah, how annoying!" she exclaimed; "she is there!"

"Who?"

"The Marquise de Mauriones, that lady in black, who shoots along and disappears," she replied, with a smile.

"The Marquise de Mauriones!" I repeated, thunderstruck. "Are you sure?"

"Perfectly sure. She is very regular here, and she is my despair. By the side of her, I feel that I am very awkward. I should very much like to know what she is thinking about to be able to forget that fear of falling which puts an iron bar into your body. I shall make no effect on you now."

As the young girl said this, her professor came up, held out his hand and took her away. Her skating was

simple and bold, a well-executed physical exercise. When she returned to us, I complimented her sincerely.

"Just watch her!" she said, looking at the Marquise. "Isn't it beautiful, that suppleness! Ah, I would give everything to skate like that!"

"You need not envy her," I said, impulsively.

"Why not?"

"Because if you skated as she does you would no longer be the girl that you are, and that would be a pity."

Leaning on the railing, Mademoiselle de Lusson watched the Marquise.

"Do you know her?" she asked.

"Slightly."

"I cannot help admiring her. She fascinates and exasperates me. I believe that if I were a man I should fall in love with her."

The professor came by and took his pupil again.

"You are very lucky to-day," said Madame de Lusson; "the best skaters are here, Baron B—— and Monsieur R——, a very scientific skater. I am not sufficiently well initiated to appreciate what Josée calls 'their work,' but, it appears, they do wonders."

The rink had gradually filled. There were baby children, young men, girls, and stout ladies who were skating in order to get thinner. I amused myself by comparing the correct and stiff movements of the Englishman with the graceful and capricious style of the Frenchman. The former appears jointless, the latter disjointed. The former seems to split the ice, the latter to skim over and to caress it. I soon distinguished the eccentrics who are the characteristic figures of the establishment. Every sport is required by Nature, but of what use is this one? Whilst watching the evolutions, more or less geometrical, of these human beings, I won-

dered what sort of pleasure they experienced. Josée, skating gracefully back to us, answered this question without knowing it —

"It is delicious!" she exclaimed, touching the railing. "The skates are like wings on one's feet!"

We had tea early, in order to leave before the arrival of the "light cavalry." Whilst Madame de Lusson paid the waiter, I accompanied her daughter to the cloak-room. At the door we met Madame de Mauriones, who was just coming out, with her veil raised. She looked straight at Mademoiselle de Lusson, then at me; her lips quivered as she bowed and passed by. All this had taken place in a second, but that jealous, violent gaze meant, "Is that young girl for Guy?" For Guy — Josée? The suggestion struck me like an arrow — and it came from Madame de Mauriones! Her look made a curious image rise in my brain, that of a long, dark road, which grew narrower farther on, and at the end of which an intense light appeared. What does it mean? In the mean time I am once more greatly disturbed in my mind.

*Paris.*

My novel has just appeared in book form. Josée has been to the Boulevards and to the principal streets, solely to see it in the shop-windows, and, quite delighted, her pretty grey eyes shining with affection and pleasure, she came to me, saying, "Madame de Myères, it is at Achille's and everywhere, everywhere." Yes, for some time it will be everywhere. Its title and my name will glare in all the windows, in all the newspapers, people will talk about it, discuss it. Two or three times a day I shall receive yellow envelopes from the *Courier de la Presse*, letters from friends, from strangers. It will all be very exciting. Then the

ebullition, after reaching the highest degree it is destined to attain, will gradually diminish. It will last a more or less long time, according to the success that the book attains. The question is on what does success depend? On the value of the work? No, not always; but on whether it touches the fibres of the majority or of the minority. A success certainly indicates the state of mind of the masses. Precursors are doomed not to be present at their own triumph. Providence, who employs them in preparing its ways, gives them, I am sure, intense inward satisfaction. Monticelli, the impressionist painter, one of the masters of the present school, left Paris cried down by the critics, misunderstood, like Nature itself, and took refuge in a quiet corner of Marseilles, his native city. He painted small pictures in order to live from day to day, exhibited them sometimes in the streets at the foot of some tree, offered them for twelve shillings, and frequently did not sell them. One day, impelled by the consciousness of his own genius, he hurried after a customer who had bargained with him in the most imbecile way.

"I say," he said, catching him by the arm, "remember that it is not for you I have worked, but for France."

Better still, the great artist had been working for Life. In our country real criticism no longer exists. In America it does not yet exist. Over there the publishers send their new books for review to young girls, whose intellect is not ripe, and who pay for reading them by writing anything about anybody. I have very naïvely sought for lessons and counsel in the articles by literary men who have reviewed my books. With the exception of two, all of them have been satisfied with giving a more or less correct *résumé* of my novels; they have then "unpacked" their own ideas, and ended by stringing together a few adjectives, eulogistic or

otherwise, for my benefit. In a word, they have only supplied copy. The criticism of literary productions or of works of art ought not to be given indiscriminately to every one. A judgment, pronounced by an incompetent writer, may ruin or slay his man. In order to obtain the right of censure, the critic, as well as the magistrate, ought to undergo examinations *ad hoc*, he ought to prove that he possesses the necessary knowledge, and that he is endowed with the particular sense which the function requires. In this way we should, perhaps, have the "good critic." The good critic, in my opinion, is the man who would study the construction, the style, the composition of a work, and would respect the conception of the author. The man who knows that in the most imperfect of human productions there is something good, and who would apply himself to bring it to light — the man, in fact, who would not serve up his criticism warm, and who would refrain from judging in a rapid, superficial way, works which have cost months and months of toil. That would be justice. Alas, the earth will not possess justice until it arrives at its golden age, and has itself been brought to the point. I look with fear and amazement at the pile of volumes that the publisher has sent me. Poor little yellow-covered books! They are to carry about, here and there and far away, the thoughts, images and sentiments which I have had in my mind. These books will reprint them in other minds. For what end? Ah, I know not. There are now in the world three little accumulators, the energy of which has been drawn from my soul. God grant that they may produce much life, much good!

*Paris.*

Guy writes to me by every post; his letters are like a cheerful ray of sunshine to me. I finger them with

delight; they are full of affectionate words. Affectionate words! I little thought that there were any more for me in this world. If any one had told me this time last year that I should be called "Dear god-mother," "God-mother darling," and this by the son of my husband, how I should have bounded with indignation! And invisible forces, Providence, were going on preparing this surprise for me. Guy affects a gaiety which does not deceive me. Ah! I know it so well, his present state of mind. He looks at the sea, the sky, the beautiful horizons of Africa, but he only sees Madame de Mauriones, her eyes encircled with paint, her sensual lips. The remembrance of her treachery gnaws at his heart, freezes him, and he, too, doubtless wonders, where? when? how? Then he makes desperate efforts of the imagination to see and hear, and he sees and hears — his throat becomes dry, his anger smoulders within him. He returns to the hotel, persuaded that Nature is a fraud, that Life has nothing in it which makes it worth living — and all this is very painful. Although I know all this, the idea of his marriage with Josée is very dear to me. What a splendid couple they would make! I should like to unite these forces, to give them to Life. But is he in a state to fall in love with any one at all? Perhaps. Grief sensibilises the individual in an extraordinary way, and at twenty-six one is in love with love. A woman is more likely to marry again at the end of a year of widowhood than after several years. Did not Chopin fall in love with George Sand at first sight, six months after his separation from the girl he had loved so long? This psychological, or physiological fact gives me some hope.

*Paris.*

The Randolphs have left Torquay and have returned home. At Sir William's request, I had sent him the manuscript of my book on England. He wanted to read it before "going away." He has just sent me his criticism of it. This gave me very great pleasure. Among other things, he said, "You have been quite fair. This is so much the more extraordinary, as the sense of justice is very feeble in women. Naturalists have omitted to note this characteristic, out of politeness, no doubt. I mention it, as I am not polite. Certain chapters of your work would not have been written if you had not come to Staffordshire, and, according to you, they were destined to be written. I was a predestined agent, then; a sort of co-operator? You see I am happy and proud about it. There is good in your ideas sometimes." Then he added at the end of his letter, "I have no voice, you know, now, and my silence troubles Freddy. He questions my face all the time with an anxious look that is intensely human, in order to find out if I am angry with him, and I am obliged to reassure him by caresses. A voiceless master, that must be sad for a dog, don't you think so?" Poor Sir William! He has now at Simley Hall his son, his daughter and his grandchildren. They are all there by his wish. Does he, then, feel that the hour of his departure is approaching?

*Paris.*

It is really as though Providence delights in astonishing Jean Noël, in multiplying surprises for him. Yesterday I was dining at the Lussons'. After soup, Josée's father suddenly asked me —

"Were the Myères who owned the Château of Chavigny, in the Department of Cher, relatives of yours?"

This unexpected question caused me such a shock that the fork fell from my hand.

"Very near relatives," I replied, forcing myself to smile; "my husband and I were those Myères. I lived at Chavigny fifteen years."

My host uttered an exclamation.

"Forgive me," said Monsieur de Lusson, in consternation. "I did not know; I ought to have found out."

"There is no harm done, I assure you. Why did you ask me that?"

"Oh, for no particular reason."

"Ah, but I want to know now. You have roused my curiosity."

"Well, then, Chavigny is to be sold again. The people who bought it — very common people, it appears — have not succeeded in getting into society in the neighbourhood, so they now want to get rid of it and leave the locality. It has been offered to me this autumn and we have been over it. Josée is quite in love with it, and is worrying me to put her dowry into it."

"Oh, Madame de Myères," exclaimed the young girl, "I did not know."

She was sitting next to me; I put my hand on hers and pressed it affectionately.

"Do not be afraid of paining me. It will soon be sixteen years since I left Chavigny. I am no longer the same person. It would be no more to me now than an empty nest, and I would not have it again at any price. Nothing would give me such delight as to see you the mistress of it. I would have chosen you among a thousand."

Josée's face brightened with joy.

"You hear, father?" she said.

"I hear," answered Monsieur de Lusson, with an aggravating smile.

"You like Chavigny very much, then?" I asked.

"Like is not the word. I loved it at first sight like a person. The beech-avenue, the row of old elms, the wood that serves as a background, give it such a warm, homelike look. It has a beautiful flight of stone steps."

The stone steps! Those words made the memory of Colette's confession flame up in my mind, and I felt myself blush.

"I have been dreaming of it ever since," added my little friend.

"And talking of it," put in Madame de Lusson.

"I have had a letter from my lawyer this morning," continued my host. "It appears that there are three farms quite near that could be bought, and it would be an excellent affair."

"Buy it! buy it!" I said eagerly. "I shall be specially grateful to you."

"The pleasure of living at Chavigny would, perhaps, decide Mademoiselle Josée to marry, and we should have her quite near."

The girl put two fingers on her lips and threw a kiss to her father.

After dinner we talked again for a long time of this purchase; I hope it will be concluded, all the more so as Monsieur de Lusson has a son by a first wife, and he probably intends to leave him the "Commanderie de Rouziers." My anger had made me quite indifferent to the fate of Chavigny. I ought not to say indifferent, for I had rejoiced to know that it was in the hands of ignorant *parvenus* who would disfigure and mutilate it. It seemed to me that my husband would suffer by that. I had been abominable, I, too. This marriage with Josée would put Guy back in the home nest. Could such a thing really come to pass? It often happens, alas that the forces we obey seem to push

our barques along towards certain places on the shore, and then, suddenly, without any visible or known reasons, they change their direction and take them to the opposite point.

*Paris.*

Poor Guy! I know now the cause of his rupture with Madame de Mauriones. Chance — no, not chance, but Providence always — Providence has put me in possession of this secret which he could not confide to me. This afternoon I went alone to the Ritz to tea. There was only one seat free in the first room, between the fire-place and the door. I took it, as there was no other. At the next table to mine there were two old men, well known in society. "Love affairs," the elder one was saying, as he lighted a cigar, "what nonsense! They don't exist, they never have existed. I have not been more unfortunate than other men ——"

"You have been more fortunate."

"No, but anyhow one might have fancied — ah well — my dear fellow. I have always paid, always, even when dresses did not cost two hundred pounds. Now-a-days, when women adorn themselves with jewellery like the Byzantine Empresses, the budget of most of the society women balances as badly as that of the *demi-mondaines*, and they all make up their deficit in the same way — they have no choice."

At that moment the Marquise de Mauriones crossed the hall. The Duc D—— winked at his companion, and, lowering his voice, said —

"Prince K—— must know what that costs him — that love-affair!"

"Do you really think that she goes the pace?"

This slang term, so abominably expressive, applied to the *grande dame* that I know, gave me a veritable shock.

"She gallops, even," replied my neighbour. "Her husband allows her an income of sixty thousand francs, her private fortune is not as much as that, and she spends at the rate of three hundred thousand a year. She has on her shoulders at this minute a stole of black fox absolutely unique, it appears, which all the women envy her. It represents the marriage dowry of a middle-class woman and must be a present from the Prince, no doubt."

"If Hauterive heard you say that — she's his fancy."

"Ah, well, I did not know that. In our world the ground is so hollow that one does not know where to tread to avoid quagmires. Good heavens, he might have heard me say that, or any one else. It's current gossip."

"Well, I shouldn't be surprised if the said gossip were the cause of the brain fever which nearly took him off."

The Duc shrugged his shoulders.

"Life will teach him as it has taught us. It gives deuced hard lessons sometimes."

Upon this the two men rose and moved away.

Ah yes, poor Guy! What a tempest such a revelation must have produced in him! And so this was why, in his delirious voice, he kept asking so pitifully for millions; this is why, in his fever, he saw black foxes everywhere. The tell-tale stole had stamped them on his brain. The Marquise was his first love. He had loved both the woman and the great lady; he had believed in her more than in God. Did he not say to me, "If the goddess I adore is false, there is no true one." And the goddess had sold her favours. As for Madame de Mauriones, I cannot help pitying her. After her divorce, out of vanity and for bravado, she wanted to continue living in the same style as when she was Duchesse de Longwy. Quite alone, she had

been compelled to hold her own in the world with her creditors. The struggle had exhausted her strength, so that she had fallen in among those wheels of which she had spoken, and her honour, her peace and her happiness had passed under them. She must suffer through herself intensely. And on seeing her, in her well-appointed victoria, some poverty-stricken woman says, perhaps, with a heart full of bitterness —

"There goes one who has a good time in this world."

*Paris.*

After sad things come the consoling ones. It is the eternal play of light and shade. Madame de Lusson had left the carriage at her daughter's disposal, and the latter came one day to take me to the Bois. The close companionship of the carriage, with a person one likes or who is congenial, gives an entirely unique sensation. The narrow space is filled with human electricity, glances meet like feelers, the voice takes a gentle distinctness, and words fall more deeply within you. Nowhere better than between these padded walls, which act as an insulator, does one have the impression of an absolute *tête-à-tête;* and a *tête-à-tête* out in the street, in the midst of and yet outside the crowd, always seems to me delicious. As we went up towards the Arc de Triomphe, a certain liveliness seemed to take possession of me, as though my companion had transmitted to me a little of her splendid vitality.

"I love to imprison you like this, Madame de Myères," she said prettily. "At least we can talk."

And we did talk. I am teaching her to look at intrinsic Life. I let her place herself at the same point with me, at that point from which one sees something of its grandeur and its beauty. Her grey eyes, which seem to listen, light up with comprehension, and it is

with joy that I hear her say, "I had never thought of that. Oh, I see, I see."

To-day the Bois looked to me divine. There was sap in all the buds, under the trees a silence of expectation, broken by a few timid notes of love. A gentle, living air caressed the branches, the thickets, the very grass, as though to hasten the resurrection. It must be good to be a tree in the spring, I thought enviously. Nature, too, has its psychological moments, and that was one of them. I congratulated myself on having surprised it. The remembrance of my winter drive with Guy in the same avenues brought me back to Mademoiselle de Lusson.

"Well, you do not talk any more of Chavigny," I said to her. "Has the affair fallen through?"

"Oh no, it's going on in the right way," she answered, "and I am wildly delighted about it." Then, with a penitent air, she added, "I ought not to let you see that I am, perhaps."

"On the contrary, my dear girl. If, after all, some one else were to have it, it would be a real grief to me. The next thing is now to find a master for it to my taste. I am terribly difficult to please."

"And what about me!" said the young girl, laughing. "I very much fear that I shall never be able to marry, and my parents are quite bent on it," she added seriously.

"Is the idea of marriage repugnant to you?"

"No, I ask for nothing better than to have a companion for my journey through life, but I want an agreeable companion."

"I understand that."

"Well, all who have been introduced so far have been uncongenial to me, at first sight."

"Because not one of them was the right man. You have not met your fate."

"Well, then, why does Providence let so many old ladies busy themselves uselessly?"

"To stir them up a little, I fancy. The woof of life is very thick, but all its threads serve for something, you may be sure of that. When Providence sends you the man who is to be your husband, you will love him, even if he should not have any of the qualities you would like him to have."

"I am afraid I should. Perhaps, though, I am destined to be an old maid."

"You don't look as though you are."

"So much the better," said the girl, with that delightful frankness which makes her so rare a creature. "And yet that would seem less hard to me than to become the wife of certain men of my acquaintance."

"You don't ask for a perfect being, I hope?"

"Heaven forbid! Perfectible beings are much more interesting."

"That is true."

"In the first place, I should want my husband to be a gentleman, in the full acceptation of the word, a man of the world, but not a society man; I should like him to be very straightforward and to be able to ride well over all obstacles."

"All that is quite reasonable," I said, suppressing a smile.

"Yes, isn't it? I should like him, too, to be gay, to have a taste for a wide, active life, and I should want him to feel the necessity of being useful to his country and to his fellow-beings. Is that asking too much?"

"No — go on."

"I should like him to be endowed with plenty of

intuition, and to comprehend Nature and art, and be interested in everything, everything."

I was rejoicing inwardly, for it seemed to me that Guy was the very man of this dream.

"All those are the elements for great happiness, for good, wholesome happiness," I said, delighted. "And all that is to be found."

"Not among the young men of our world. They are badly brought up, absurd. They even spoil the pleasure of dancing for me. When I come back from a ball I always say, 'It wasn't worth the trouble.'"

I began to laugh.

"Not very long ago a young man of my acquaintance spoke to me of girls in the same terms. He said they did not inspire him with any confidence."

"I don't blame him, they are rather alarming; but it is not their fault. Thanks to the education they receive they feel Life, and then they are not allowed to take any part in it. Many of them have generous ideas, a wish to do good; they beg with all their might and main to be permitted to organise societies for relieving the poor, but they are always answered, 'When you are married!' They are obliged to have recourse to dress and frivolities. Idleness either corrupts or weakens them. And all that, you know, Madame de Myères, is because parents dare not alter the approved routine. I can say this without any disloyalty to my parents, for they have gone as far in their concessions as the manners and customs of our country allow. During my stay at Simley Hall, two years ago, I envied the English girls their active life, their comradeship with real young men. All the girls there have their schools or clubs, an interest in life of some kind. They do something, in fact."

"Why should you not take the initiative in imitating them?"

Josée looked at me, hesitated, and then, with a pretty smile, she said —

"Well, I am going to tell you a secret. There are six of us now who are doing something."

"Oh, what good news!" I exclaimed, delighted. "And what are you doing?"

"Well, this is how it is. My greatest friend, Jocelyne Montford, lost her father, and as soon as she came into her share of the family fortune she allowed herself the luxury of having a family; she made a home for twelve little girls, twelve poor little deserted creatures. She brings them up at her own expense in a little house with a garden, that she has rented at Neuilly. A Scotch lady offered to help her, and she is the matron there. With only one servant, Mrs. Ardoch manages everything. You cannot imagine anything as nice as that home. From attic to cellar, in the very atmosphere even, the taste and refinement of two ladies can be felt."

"Who teaches these children?"

"They go to the ordinary day-school. At eight o'clock, when they start, they have had breakfast and put the house to rights, under the superintendence of the servant. My friend neglects nothing in order to make them feel that they have a home. Mrs. Ardoch is Mother Mary, and Mademoiselle Montfort Mother Jocelyne. Four other girls and I go to Neuilly regularly on Thursdays and Sundays. We give them gymnastic and singing lessons. We examine their linen and their clothes to see what they need. We go to the Bon Marché and buy remnants, and we look out for bargains, like economical housewives. Nothing is

more amusing. Ah, they do wear out their things though, these little brats; but they are all so well," said Josée, with maternal satisfaction. "It is curious, but when we are working for them we have noticed that we get a special, delicious kind of warmth in the tips of our fingers. It is the effect of imagination, perhaps."

"Oh no," I said, "for I feel it myself when I am crocheting my poor mufflers. It is a kind of electricity, the fluid of fraternity, perhaps. When savants study the exteriorisation of man they will discover the phenomenon. But how did your families look upon this initiative?"

"With very unwilling eyes. Mademoiselle Montfort had to do battle, but we finished by winning the day. They are all obliged to own that we are doing some good. Our mothers are more inclined to be proud of us now. The comic part is that they go about priding themselves on their liberal spirit and praise themselves for our emancipation. Mademoiselle Montfort was really a pioneer. Her example will be followed. I have four boys at Rouziers, you know," added Josée, blushing.

"And you never told me that, you sly child."

"It wasn't worth while."

"Who takes care of them?"

"My old English governess. She has deserted me for them, and she brings them up wonderfully well. When I am married," added the young girl, with a mocking intonation, "I shall have twelve of them. Jocelyne and I will then let our children marry each other. Another of our friends is trying educating boys and girls together. Oh, we have some magnificent plans!"

"I hope you will persevere when you are married," I said, gaily.

"Perhaps we shall not find any men courageous enough to marry philanthropic girls. Anyhow, we have promised each other only to marry men capable of interesting themselves in our work. We are resolved not to let ourselves be absorbed by them. A whole woman for a husband is too much."

This delicious enormity brought a smile through the refreshing tears which had filled my eyes. Have I seen, then, to-day, at the same time as the spring, the beginning of the evolution which is to give us true mothers? May God grant it. France stands in need, not of children, but of mothers.

*Paris.*

The return of Guy and Uncle Georges gave me many joys that I never thought to experience again in this world. For sixteen years I have had no one to expect, and I had forgotten the sweetness and the emotion of these home-comings. The morning of their arrival I went to the Rue d'Aguesseau to see that everything was right and to take some flowers there. I was surprised to find the little garden full of life, after leaving it two months before, still and silent. The sycamores had leaves and birds, the lilacs were in flower, the rose-trees in bud, and around the four ivy-covered walls there were violets and primroses. When I went out on to the stone steps a gust of perfumed air fanned my face, and, with a long breath, I absorbed a little of the spring. It is curious how thoroughly I enjoy this season of the year. It is as though it were the first — or the last I am ever to see. I realise that a multitude of various saps is destined to aliment the life of man, and the life of man to aliment

universal Life. I have the consciousness of being really in the midst of eternity.

Louis took me all through the flat, and I complimented him on the perfect order to which it testified. A pile of house linen which I had ordered had arrived the evening before. I looked through it, article by article, with childish satisfaction. That odour of linen, which recalled my own housekeeping, was most fragrant. I put the flowers I had brought here and there. That little ground-floor flat (so gay at this season, so comfortable in winter), which gets the light of the setting sun, makes me envious. I should like to end my days there tranquilly. Louis took me into his confidence about the surprise he had in store for his master. During Guy's absence he has been to Panhard's, learning to drive an automobile. He told me that he did not want to have to hang about in Paris, while his master was on the high roads. An innate taste for machinery had made his apprenticeship an easy one, and he had obtained his certificate. I completed his delight by asking him to call at the hotel for me on the way to the station. In his impatience he arrived half-an-hour too soon. Whilst walking up and down on the platform, I felt very happy and extremely proud of having some one to expect. Pride is to be found everywhere. When the train entered the station I looked out eagerly for my travellers. Presently I felt an arm round my neck, and heard the well-remembered voice exclaim —

"Thank you, god-mother. It was just you that I wanted to see."

Alas, no, it was not, poor boy! Uncle Georges gave me one of those hearty handshakes in which he manages to put an infinite number of pleasant things. My godson was glad to find his automobile there, and still more glad to see it driven by Louis.

"You were jealous of my chauffeur, were you?" he said, smiling.

"Perhaps I was, Monsieur Guy," answered the good fellow, colouring at being found out.

"You animal!"

The tone in which this epithet was uttered converted it into a friendly expression.

I dined at the Rue d'Aguesseau, unnecessary to say, and we talked until very late. This unburdening of mind and heart, which absence prepares, is good. Guy has come back to me in perfect health, but he has changed in the most extraordinary way. The fine bloom of youth which he had retained has disappeared. His face has aged ten years; he is thinner, and that makes him look taller. His features have received a sort of final chiselling which has refined them and made them more decided. His mouth has become obstinate and hard. He rarely finishes his smile. His voice has acquired some fine, deep notes. There is more relief, more character about his whole person. And Nature has accomplished all this work by means of that invisible agent called Sorrow. The changes that he has undergone have accentuated still more his resemblance to my husband. Every instant it gives me an inward shock.

I am doing my best to soften the bitterness of his disappointment. I endeavour to make him understand, as Madame de Mauriones asked me to do, the inevitable force of certain currents of Life. The conversation I had overheard allowed me to treat his soul with a thorough knowledge of the case. I insisted on his returning to Grignon; I make him work. He clings to me like a child. He comes to dinner nearly every evening at the Hôtel Castiglione. On Sunday he takes me for a long carriage or automobile drive, then we go to his rooms for tea. Yesterday, almost as soon as I was there, he

showed me two small portraits framed together: that of Monsieur de Myères and mine.

I felt myself colouring violently.

"Where did you get that photograph?" I stammered.

"I had it from Uncle Georges, but not without difficulty, and on condition that I would have it reproduced."

It was a portrait of me at thirty-eight, with very thick brown hair coiled on the top of my head, as it is worn to-day, my eyes full of happiness, a triumphant smile, a face without wrinkles, the pure oval still there. This photograph, which I remembered well, only reproduces my bust; the low, draped bodice, made by Worth, has the beautiful classic lines of which he possesses the art, and which are safe from the caprices of fashion. Thanks to that, I do not look like an antiquated being. Would any one believe it? In spite of the tumult of awakened memories, I noticed this and rejoiced.

"What fancy took you?" I said to Guy, overcoming my emotion.

"God-father looked so lonely. I put you together there as you are in my affection; wasn't that right?" asked the young man, looking at me fixedly.

"Quite right," I answered firmly.

He took the photographs which I was holding out to him and kissed my hand. He has united us again — he, of all people! Oh, the great, sweet, cruel irony of it!

*Paris.*

The Château of Chavigny became the property of my little friend Josée yesterday. Jean Noël would be tempted to put an immense note of admiration there! When, this evening after dinner, I told Guy the news, he sprang up from his arm-chair and changed colour.

"Chavigny was to be sold and you never told me,

god-mother!" he exclaimed, with an accent of pain and reproach.

I then told him the strange way in which the fact had come to my knowledge. He paced up and down the room in increasing agitation.

"Chavigny to be sold! If only I had known! Why, I should have bought it!"

"What for?" I asked, obeying an unaccountable perverseness.

The young man stopped in front of me and looked at me with an expression which disturbed my equanimity.

"How can you ask what for, god-mother?" he said. "So that it should not fall into the hands of strangers."

"Do you remember it?"

"Do I remember it! Why, I was nine years old when I was taken there for the last time, and god-father let me have my first shot in the wood which skirts the river."

Instantaneously, these words created in my mind the image of my husband with this handsome lad, who was really his son. My throat was parched with emotion.

"Ah, you never told me!"

"No, it was to be a great secret between us two," replied the young man, with a smile. "Four years ago, when on a visit in the Department of the Cher, I wanted to see the *château* again. I went roaming round it like a thief. It looked desolate, badly kept. It was easy to guess that those who lived in it were only intruders, and I said to myself that I would buy it back if it ever came into the market."

"But I cannot imagine you there, all alone — perhaps you were thinking of marrying?"

Guy, who was smoking furiously, took his cigarette from his lips and began to laugh.

"I, thinking of marrying! Heaven forbid! I would give up my share of Paradise if I had to acquire it by

running such a risk. You would have come to live at Chavigny with me. That would have torn you away from your hotel life. In the neighbourhood there are acres and acres of land to be worked. I should have succeeded in making a splendid estate of it. What a fine dream it was, wasn't it?"

"A childish dream, my boy. Nothing would have induced me to receive hospitality in a house in which, for so long a time, I had dispensed it. Then, too, what is the use of discussing it? Providence has disposed of it in another way."

"Providence! Well, then, I don't thank Providence. It might have remembered my existence and my rights."

"Your rights?" I repeated, startled.

Guy coloured.

"Well, yes, that's a way of speaking. Since your sister-in-law died without children, there is no one else belonging to the family. So that Chavigny ought to have come to me in my quality of god-son and second cousin by marriage. I am sure that god-father would have wished it. He was very fond of me; very fond of me, you know."

"I know — I know," I answered brusquely.

"I say, god-mother," the young man began again, after a moment's silence, "is there no way of getting Monsieur de Lusson to let me take over his purchase? Suppose you were to ask him?"

"Impossible. All the more so as it is a very good piece of business. Even if he were inclined to consent, his daughter would object. She is in love with Chavigny, and would not let her parents rest in peace until they had put her dowry into it. For my part, I am glad that it has fallen into hands like hers. She will appreciate it, and will know how to give it back its former beauty."

"She may marry some idiot who will not trouble himself about it."

"I am quite easy about that; she will never marry an idiot."

"She likes the country?"

"Very much."

"A phenomenon then?" said Guy, in an ironical tone.

"No, but Mademoiselle de Lusson has Irish and English blood in her veins. Hence her need of physical activity and fresh air. Is it not wonderful that Sir William Randolph, a foreigner, should have introduced to me the future mistress of Chavigny?"

"It would be less wonderful, but more just, if I had become the master of it," said the young man, with an irritation which I felt was caused by disappointment. "A girl who makes her people buy her a *château!* Did any one ever hear of such a thing?" he added between his teeth.

Race! That profound and sacred thing, that soul of the soul, I saw it in him. It was that which was suffering just now in my husband's son, it was that which protested, which claimed the ancestral home! The grief which Guy had just felt may be able to put him on the road to happiness. In spite of himself, he will think of the mistress of Chavigny, with irritation, perhaps, but he will think of her. It is impossible that she should not inspire him with some curiosity. Before his departure, he left a card at the Lussons' in order to thank them for having asked after him when he was ill. I am too intimate with them now to be able to delay introducing him to them. When I happen to mention "my godson," and I do it often unintentionally, I feel that Josée is listening, and I have an intuition that my words hit their mark. Is it an illusion? Very much depends on the first meeting. If the gods intend me to arrange this

marriage, they will suggest to me the propitious hour and minute.

*Paris.*

Another tomb on my road! There were already so many! Sir William Randolph is no more. I feel from here the grief of his family, even of Freddy; the void caused by his absence in that home which he filled so completely. I feel, above all, that I have lost some one. How could two brief meetings have united us so closely? Did we not already know each other when he came to me on the verandah of the Hôtel Riche last year, with a friendly glance, a jesting word on his lips? Do we know, ah, do we know? The day before he died, he went for a walk in the park, and passed the evening in the observatory in the company of his son. His night was painful and sleepless. He did not get up at the usual hour, but he felt tired! Ah, God, how tired he must have been! As soon as breakfast was over, Lady Randolph went up-stairs again to him. His body was there, his eyes closed, he was motionless, still warm, but the soul had gone, gone without a sound, without a farewell, like a being who had escaped. This morning the English post brought me a letter from the dead man, his living thought, and that thought I transcribe here —

"Just a word to say good-bye, whilst the wick is still smoking. Oh, it is really smoking! When this reaches you, Freddy's master will no longer be in this world. The world will not notice this, but at two imperceptible points of the globe, at Simley and in a certain Parisian hotel, he will be regretted a little, he will be thought of with affection. This idea is not disagreeable. My sufferings have become such that I am in a hurry to leave this broken body, which no longer breathes and can no

longer speak. It has the effect on me of a loathsome rag, and at times I am tempted to kick it away. Death is much more terrible from afar than near. No doubt Nature always prepares us for it. I wanted to assure you of this in exchange for what you have brought me. Your rational faith, enlightened by the little science we possess, has strengthened my blind and frequently wavering faith. I do not mind confessing it. And this help was to come to me from a Frenchwoman, from a bridge-player. It is enough to excite the humouristic spirit of a Britisher, even, when dying — this is my last jest. Accept it graciously, as you did all the others. I should like you to come every year to rest for a time at Simley. I give you a formal invitation. All my family, great and small, will be happy to have you. Claude will take my place at the observatory. When you are there, do ask Freddy where his master is; I wager that he will lift his head towards that sky which he has seen me exploring so long. The soul of a dog is not as obscure as it is believed to be.

"The fable of Pandora, which shows us Hope at the bottom of the famous box — the human brain, no doubt, — was certainly a divine inspiration. The hope of immortality, and of meeting every one again, has taken the place of the hope of cure, it increases the nearer I approach the bar, and, thanks to this, I shall cross it without fear, if not without regret.

"I send an affectionate message to the Lussons, and good wishes to our friend Josée. What you have just written concerning the purchase of your old home amazed me. Evidently a little *rôle* was destined for me in your life here below. I hope to have a larger one elsewhere.

"Now I am waiting for my call; it cannot be long delayed. Whether it should come with the morning star

or with the evening star, at midday or at midnight, I am ready! God bless you!"

How many things I felt and divined between these brave lines.

The Lussons felt deep regret at the death of Sir William. We shall often talk of him. I gave them his letter to them, and Josée read it with eyes full of tears.

"After all, father," she said, folding it again reverently, "it is a great thing to have faith."

Monsieur de Lusson coloured slightly, and turned away his head.

*Paris.*

Well, Guy's introduction to Mademoiselle de Lusson is an accomplished fact, and I had nothing to do with it. Jean Noël could never have imagined such a pretty scene for a first meeting. He must now content himself with reproducing it. Yesterday, after luncheon, I was called to the telephone by Josée. She asked me whether I should like to go to a lecture at the People's University in the Faubourg St. Antoine. Upon my reply in the affirmative, she said that her father and she would call for me that evening at eight o'clock. They came, and on the way Monsieur de Lusson told me that he went there twice a week to give lessons in chess. That is his part of the co-operation. We got out of the carriage in front of a very gloomy house, and, after going along an alley and across a courtyard, we penetrated into a sort of hall, at the entrance of which was a plaster statue, the reproduction of an antique. A few gentlemen were talking with some workmen. Monsieur de Lusson went into the room reserved for the noble game. Josée showed me the library. The long table was occupied by readers, men

and women, who were so much absorbed that they did not look at us. Among them I noticed a young girl, simply dressed, but evidently a lady. She was accompanied by an elderly maid. On our entrance she rose and came towards us, smiling. I guessed that it was Jocelyne Montfort. As soon as we were outside, Mademoiselle de Lusson introduced her to me.

She is a brunette, and her pretty face, with its dull, white complexion, its intelligent eyes and kind mouth, charmed me. I held out my hand to her and clasped hers affectionately. We entered the meeting-hall together. It was nearly full. The public was composed of working men and women, of women without hats who looked as though they had come in as neighbours, and of poor artists. We slipped into the last row. All around on the walls I saw, with pleasure, pictures, beautiful photographs, maps; the lecturer, a congenial young student, took his place on the platform. To his right, at the foot of the steps, I suddenly saw, to my great surprise, Guy in person, Guy manipulating the lantern slides! His presence there certainly was the most unexpected of things. He had never spoken to me of the People's University or of any work of the kind. More than once I had pointed out to him the necessity of helping the weak, of entering into the struggle for the amelioration and progress of humanity. He had always contented himself with answering, "You are right." Had my words carried? Was he trying to forget his disappointment by occupying himself with others? In this case Madame de Mauriones' treachery will have produced some good. I turned towards Josée.

"Monsieur d'Hauterive is over there, by the screen!" I said to her.

The darkness of the room prevented my seeing the expression of her face, but I felt magnetically the shock

that my words caused her. I am persuaded that my god-son quite eclipsed the lecturer for her. As for me, I was soon captivated by the subject he treated, "Egyptian art and the Egyptian people." I wondered at first how that could interest people who only had the most elementary education. Well, yes, Egyptian art and the Egyptian people did interest these humble ones. They listened as I had never seen people listen; they were all eyes and ears! Preceding lectures must have made them able to comprehend, for they seemed to follow the young savant perfectly. As I saw, appearing on the white sheet, projections of gigantic temples, pieces of frescoes, of gods, of ancient symbols, I realised that these were fragments of the great accumulators left by the Egyptians. By means of photography, which has become one of Nature's vehicles and agents, these images, forms and lines have arrived across the centuries, from the banks of the Nile to the banks of the Seine, to stamp themselves again on the brains of these Parisian workmen, in order to scatter there the germs of other works of art, no doubt. How divine it is, this work! That history lesson, so clear and so well composed, caused me real pleasure. I was delighted to see the lecturer awaken interest in these predecessors and gratitude to them, by showing us the close bonds which unite us, by enumerating the inherited forces and light which come to us from them. Retrospective fraternity is a step towards future fraternity.

When the lecture was over we went to wait for Monsieur de Lusson in the hall. I looked anxiously towards the door, wishing, yet fearing, to see Guy appear, wondering whether the time for the introduction had come? As I was asking myself that question he arrived in company with the lecturer and stopped to exchange a few words with a group of workmen. Just at the moment

when the father of my little friend joined us, he turned round, caught sight of me, and came at once to me.

"God-mother!" he exclaimed.

He stopped short, embarrassed by his own indiscretion. In his surprise he had not noticed that I was not alone.

I could not hesitate any longer, and I introduced my god-son. Monsieur de Lusson held out his hand to him and put him at his ease with a few pleasant words. In this genial atmosphere, where there was co-operation of ideas, we chatted very agreeably for a few minutes. What I had foreseen happened. Guy looked at the mistress of Chavigny, and Josée looked at the god-son of Madame de Myères. They were both curious, to my great satisfaction. The light fell full on the two faces, and, good or bad, the impression must have been very distinct.

I returned home rather disconcerted, like a chauffeur who has seen the guiding-wheel which he held taken out of his hands. To-day I have felt upset and nervous. I was sure that Guy would want to talk about last evening. I was right. He "brought himself here," as people now say. The funniest part is that he thought it his duty to make an excuse for coming.

"The attraction of your society, god-mother, and the *cuisine* of the Hôtel de Castiglione make me intrusive," he said. "You will be asking me one of these days to take my meals elsewhere a little more often!"

"Perhaps so. To-day, besides the good dinner, you came in search of compliments, did you not?"

Guy coloured.

"Jean Noël, you are terrible," he said, good-humouredly.

"I will not be niggardly with them. Your presence at the People's University gave me great pleasure. To

work for others is a manly way of getting away from one's own sorrow. I hope that you will, in your turn, give some lectures."

"Next winter, yes."

"I was delighted to have the opportunity of introducing you to Monsieur de Lusson. What did you think of him?"

"I found him very congenial."

"You owe a visit to his wife now. I shall take you to the Rue de Lille one of these days."

"Very well, when you like," my godson replied, with surprising docility.

"By the bye, what were those girls doing there?" he continued, as though the question had not been all the time on his lips.

"Why, they are members of the Association; they are interested in its development, and look after the library; they have attended the lectures all the winter."

"Rather blue, are they?"

"Why not? Do you know that Mademoiselle Montfort has a family of twelve children, whom she brings up at her own expense?"

"Indeed! And the mistress of Chavigny, how many has she?" asked Guy, in a more mocking tone.

"Four," I replied, tranquilly.

"It's a new fashion then? A trick for getting emancipated, perhaps."

"There, that's how you are, you men," I said, indignantly. "You complain of the frivolity of girls, and then, when one of them is trying to employ her affection and her intellect creditably, you are at once distrustful. You want to continue having them kept on a skewer just ready for you. It is not purity you ask for, but merely ignorance of the one thing which you yourselves wish to reveal to them, and in the fear of depriving

yourself of this doubtful pleasure, in order to satisfy this barbarous requirement of yours, girls are to be held in, they are not to be allowed to mix in social life. The fresh forces of which humanity has need are to be immobilised. Later on, if their husband ceases to please them, they will ask lovers for the only happiness they have been taught to know. You get exactly the wives you deserve."

"God-mother, are you going in for feminism?" asked Guy, smiling.

"Not the feminism that preaches hatred of the strong sex, but that which claims for women participation in the affairs of this world. No one has a greater admiration than I for man, as regards brain. When I see him driving in the piles of a bridge, boring through mountains, extorting Nature's secrets, one by one, I feel very small. The heaviness of his burden, even, inspires me with maternal pity. But I also see that he cannot suffice for everything. If woman is necessary to complete his life, she is also necessary to complete his work. She is capable of helping him in fighting against tuberculosis, alcoholism, of aiding him to create salubrious dwellings, where the little ones can grow up comfortably. Under the government of man alone there are too many people cold and hungry, there is too much vice also, too much moral uncleanliness. In our country, public charity is organised in such a way that out of five francs only two reach the poor — two, do you understand? The hospitals are a disgrace to France. It is time — high time — that woman should intervene in the things that are within her competence, for she is the mother, after all. She alone ought to be charged with helping the wounded on Life's battlefield. She alone ought to hold the purse for the poor. Am I unreasonable?"

"No,"

"Well, then, my dear boy," I continued, "all that requires an apprenticeship. This apprenticeship ought to be the complement of the young girl's education. We shall arrive at that in time. Nature has made use of the Saxon woman for opening the way, for clearing the ground; she now has need of the warmth of soul, the idealism, the femininity even of the Latin and Slavonic woman. She will not delay putting these fine forces into action. If I am not mistaken, the initial movement has been given. In Paris we are beginning to meet young girls in the dispensaries, in the *crèches*."

"And in the People's Universities," added Guy, mockingly.

"And in the People's Universities, as you saw," I replied coldly.

"It is somewhat disquieting."

"Reserve your disquietude for other girls than Mademoiselle Montfort and Mademoiselle de Lusson. The former is over twenty-five years of age; she has never made bad use of the liberty she has conquered. The latter is as good as the day."

"God-mother, I shall get seriously jealous of this young person. You are bewitched by her. She has already supplanted me at Chavigny; I won't have her supplanting me with you."

This, said in a joking tone, ended our discussion. I refrained from asking him what he thought of Josée. If she had been uncongenial to him, he would not have failed to tell me. His silence reassures me on this point.

*Paris.*

The Lussons have given the signal for the break-up. They are the first to leave Paris. Our friendship has been so much closer these last months that their absence makes a great void for me. We are to meet

again at Aix-les-Bains. After our stay there, for the waters, we are to travel together to Touraine. I shall first go to Vouvray to visit some friends, and then to Rouziers. That is the programme of our holidays. Guy is to spend some time at " Les Rocheilles," and then join me with his automobile. We have made some fine plans for excursions in Savoy and Switzerland. I am now quite accustomed to modern locomotion. At first, I was wildly afraid, afraid of the turns in the road, afraid of running over children or animals. I did not allow this to be seen, so that my companion's pleasure should not be spoilt, and still more because of my vanity as an old woman. At present I understand the automobile, and I love it like something living. This blind force, of which the chauffeur becomes the soul, does not cease to amaze me. I know when I may talk to my steersman and when I ought to be quiet. This has frequently won compliments for me. We are now exploring the environs of Paris. There are a number of places that I wanted to see again: Chantilly, Enghien, Malmaison, Fontainebleau. The forest is very dear to me. Some ten years ago, during a rather long stay at the Hôtel Ville of Lyon, I walked through it in all directions. It consoled me in a mysterious manner. I always felt better after I had been there. The remembrance of my isolation, then, makes the pleasure more intense which I feel at being cared for and protected once more. Is it the father or the son who is taking me about with him? At times I do not know, and I am thoroughly happy. I am afraid, though, of suddenly waking up and finding myself alone, as before, in the middle of one of the crossroads.

In spite of this I keep begging Guy to leave Paris. The stay here is not good for him, as too many things must remind him of what he ought to forget. His

expression is always strained and serious. It really only brightens up for me. When we are going through the Bois, I am always expecting, at the turn of one of the avenues, to come face to face with Madame de Mauriones, and I cannot help wishing for this. Does he still love her, or is he only suffering from the insult that she offered him? That is what interests Jean Noël. He would not be sorry to see them again in presence of each other. How pitiless a novelist's inquisitiveness is!

*Paris.*

Jean Noël has had his wish, and, as usual, in an unexpected way. Guy came to fetch me this afternoon at half-past four for our last drive, as he leaves to-morrow.

"It is rather warm still," I said; "let us go and have tea at the Ritz."

"All right, god-mother," he answered; "I have not set foot inside there this year."

Upon which he turned his automobile towards the Place Vendôme.

The garden of the Ritz Hôtel has a look of the eighteenth century which harmonises well with the light dresses of the women. This green nook situated between the Rue de la Paix and the Rue de Castiglione, is delightful. When I am alone I go there very early. It is quite silent then, and full of birds. Gradually the tea-drinkers arrive, form themselves into groups, and then curious human cackling begins, and gets louder and louder. I have learnt to listen to it. It is very ugly, and I am amazed to think that it can express so many things. There were a great many people there when we arrived. My usual table was free. We sat down, and I ordered tea. As the waiter moved away, I suddenly saw Madame de Mauriones behind where he had been standing. She was seated almost facing us, under

one of the large parasols in the garden, in company with three other young women, the Marchioness d'A—, and Countess C—. At the same moment I saw her eyes and those of Guy meet like two swords. A slight pallor passed over my god-son's face, his nostrils dilated, and his mouth became rigid. The Marquise gave a sudden start, and shrank back like a creature who had been struck. Her eyelids fell as though under an invisible pressure. One of those shocks to the soul had occurred, which reveal the real sentiments of individuals. I comprehended that with Guy there was nothing left but the anger of the male who has been deceived, whilst with Madame de Mauriones love was still there.

Our tea was brought, and I poured a cup for my companion. As he stirred it his hand shook slightly, but his face was impassive.

"A pretty sight!" he said, looking round the room.

"A twentieth century tea," I said. "There is nothing imposing about it, but it is brilliant, and there are plenty of beauties."

"Of deceptions!" he remarked. "Dyed hair and painted lips. Just look round, you who are a physiognomist, and tell me whether you discover one woman, one single woman," he repeated, maliciously, "who looks capable of any deep sentiment at all."

"I do not see that the presence of a few *grandes amoureuses* is necessary to complete the picture of this afternoon tea. Providence does not lavish its treasures like that!"

Guy began to laugh.

"Oh, god-mother, what a way of looking at life!"

"It is the right way, my dear boy," I answered, seriously. "And it is a crime to try to pick a quarrel with Nature and with humanity in such perfect weather."

"Well, then, let us say with Candide that 'all is for

the best in the best of worlds,'" said the young man ironically.

I turned the conversation on to the subject of "Les Rocheilles," and then spoke of his brother, and his irritation gradually calmed down. I could not help glancing at Madame de Mauriones. She was adorable in a delicate-looking dress of pale mauve, and under a hat trimmed with large anemones of the same tone of colour. She was chattering gaily, but two pink spots were burning her cheek-bones. Our eyes met several times. Mine were full of the maternal pity with which she inspires me. She understood, and thanked me with her slow smile. I was in a hurry to get away.

"If you have finished tea, Guy, let us start, shall we?" I said.

"There's no hurry, god-mother," he replied. "It's quite nice here, a regular Paradise!"

He lighted a cigarette, and I understood that he did not want to be the first to move away. The light fell full on him, and his face, bronzed by the open air, was very manly-looking. The contrast of the dark hair, the dark blue eyes and the tawny moustache, that contrast I had loved so much in the old days, made him cruelly fascinating. I dare say he is just as conscious of his power as any woman. I was horribly uncomfortable. It seemed to me as though I were lending myself as an accomplice for this masculine revenge. Madame de Mauriones' tea-party came to an end. She passed by us as she went out with the Marchioness d'A—, and the pride of her bearing was like a challenge. Guy watched her with an expression in which there was a kind of astonishment. When she had disappeared he rose and threw away his cigarette.

"I am ready for your orders now, god-mother."

"A man who has been wounded is certainly very cruel," I said to myself.

## VIII

### AIX-LES-BAINS.

*Palace Hôtel, Aix-les-Bains.*

It is always with regret that I leave my comfortable "branch" in Paris. The Hôtel de Castiglione is not commonplace, and it has nothing of the coldness which usually characterises the ordinary "travellers' house." This is due to its Franco-Italian atmosphere. The owner of it is Italian and his wife French. Unconsciously he brings into his business the qualities of his race. He is not only the hotel-keeper, he is the host. Independently of all questions of interest, he likes every one to be comfortable under his roof, to enjoy the table and like the rooms. As soon as one enters this hotel one feels the desire that every one connected with it has to be agreeable, from the hall-porter and smart pages to those employed in the office, and to the manager himself. In the dining-room the waiters, who are mostly Italians, have that innate courtesy and gentleness which distinguishes the people of their country. The valets and the chamber-maids, who are all French, like their work and the people they wait upon. Louis and Eugénie, a married couple who look after me, are not mere machines for cleaning and sweeping. They are kindly and sensible, they appreciate a pleasant word as much as a gratuity. This exteriorisation of the Latin soul impregnates the atmosphere with a something that one never meets with in English, German or Swiss hotels. The

intangible something is always recognised by foreigners who have lived in Italy. It is, no doubt, a little warmth which one likes, and which one cannot help missing afterwards. I never regretted leaving the Hôtel de Castiglione so much before. At the last moment I went back to the lift, ostensibly to go up to my room and see whether I had forgotten anything, but in reality to say another farewell to it. The very walls seemed to want to keep me there. Can it be that I shall never go back there, even to die. The door of the station omnibus, which took me away, banged in a peculiar way which made a curious impression on me.

The hall-porter accompanied me to the station. Last year, when he was seeing me off for England, I said to him, smiling —

"Some day, Henri, you will not put me into a train, but into a hearse."

"May that day be a long way off, madame," he said, "for I shall not be as gay then as I am now."

No society man could have made a better little speech.

The heat had compelled me to take the night train, but at break of day I was looking at those wild, harmonious sites of Savoy which are so fascinating to me. All mankind was sleeping, and one could have fancied that the human race did not yet exist. This impression is unique, and the landscape appears so much grander without man. The Bourget Lake made me utter an exclamation of delight. Motionless, as though enchanted, and of an extraordinary blue which makes it look like a sheet of electricity, I shuddered as I gazed at it, as I might have done on the brink of a precipice. I do not know any lake more variable and more strange. It has almost a face, a passionate and perfidious face. Beneath its calm one feels that there is violence, and under the violence one feels its calm, and is never weary of it. It affected me

deeply to see Aix-les-Bains again. During the last five years of my husband's life we had always spent half of July and the whole of August there. I had never been able to persuade myself to return to it. Why should it make me suffer more than any other place? I cannot explain that to myself.

According to the advice of the Lussons, I went to the Palace Hôtel, one of the best in the town. The room that had been reserved made a very good impression on me. It has everything necessary for one's comfort. One of the windows looks on to the valley and has a beautiful distant view of mountain-tops; the other looks on to the Villa des Fleurs. My first walk was a pilgrimage. I wanted to see the villa in which my husband and I had lived, a villa situated on the heights a few steps away from the Splendide. A friend used to let it to us each season. Bitter-sweet memories were stirred as I climbed the hill, and when I arrived at the house I had neither breath nor legs. I caught hold of the iron entrance gate, and I gazed at the house with all my soul. The trees had grown bushy and the wild vine covered it entirely. My eyes went straight to the verandah where Guy and I — the other Guy — had spent delightful evenings, with the moon lighting up the valley and the Dent du Chat, and the music sounding like a distant accompaniment to our conversation. Those evenings were for my husband his proofs of a gambler's repentance, and the repentances of gamblers are such that they almost make one wish for more relapses. Certainly there was no longer anything of us in that dwelling, and yet, thanks to a phenomenon still unexplained and entirely subjective, it seemed to me as though it were surrounded by a vibrating atmosphere. There was a magnetic current between those walls and me, which gave me back something of my former happiness. Science will not spoil any-

thing when it reveals to us the divine mysteries of our life. I believe that love is a thousand times more beautiful and greater than we see it. I am not sorry to be alone here for a few days. Isolation would be intolerable to me now, but I could not give up my solitude and independence entirely.

*Aix-les-Bains.*

It is amusing to suddenly see changes that have been taking place gradually. Aix has not been losing its time since my last visit, just sixteen years ago. Its cleanliness was the first new feature which struck me. The Mayor and the Municipal Council deserve a good mark, all the more so as cleanliness is not among the instincts of the natives. I found that fragment of an arch, which is all that remains of the Aix of the Romans, still standing. It seems to say to the Aix of the Savoyards. "Remember that you must die." The visitors are more numerous, and there is more rustling of silk now. There are more amusements, too, but in spite of all that, Aix has lost something. It has been deserted by a certain class of people, and it no longer has that aristocratic stamp which formerly covered the multitude of its sins. Its sins! In all watering-places Life describes a parabole which has its *raison d'être*, the sole end of which is not merely to fill the pockets of the inhabitants. In March or April the arrival of the first visitors gives the initial movement — this movement goes on increasing all the time. In August it attains its maximum, it then begins to decrease, and in October it ceases completely. At Aix, in that peaceful valley which is like a bee-hive turned upside down, with mountains for walls, there is an alarming ebullition of passions, of joyous effervescence of life, produced by the beauty of women, pretty toilettes, the glitter of jewellery, by an infinity

of things which good people do not suspect, but which they unconsciously enjoy. All this lasts for five or six weeks. People love at Aix by the day, the hour or the night; they hate each other, are jealous, gamble madly, get rich or are ruined. Pleasures succeed pleasures. There are dinners, suppers, the theatre, excursions, picnics, music, illuminations, dynamite fireworks. All this increases the speed of the whirlwind, which is most violent in the gambling-room of the Club and of the Villa des Fleurs. The little cards covered with figures, with red and black signs, the combinations of which are not left to men, create tempests under the human craniums round the green tables. The *demi-mondaines* add the eternal temptation, and the atmosphere is laden with desire, covetousness and greed. Words are heard and bargains made that give one a shiver of pity, ah, yes, of pity, and after a minute or two one has to go away to get a breath of fresh air from outside. The Folies-Aixoises is opposite my hotel. The other evening the wild rhythm of the music and the vociferations which accompanied it made me suddenly start violently and exclaim aloud, "Why, it is a regular *bamboula!*" It was as though something within me had recognised it, and I was by no means proud of this. It may be that Nature takes this way of over-exciting life at certain points with us, just as with the negroes of Africa? Is not the regular annual phenomenon which we call "the season," in the capitals and the watering-places, the *bamboula* of white people? I am afraid it is so. As a matter of fact, our *bamboulas* are more elegant and refined, they include the nobler elements that we have acquired through all the centuries, but all the same they are of the same character. We certainly have beautiful classical music, but we also have the *tam-tam* of the music-halls, which reminds one of the tribe and of the tent. What do these *bamboulas*

produce? We should be amazed, perhaps, if we were allowed to know, and I repeat with Maeterlinck: "Evil is the good that we do not understand." Aix-les-Bains, Trouville, Biarritz, Monte Carlo are, perhaps, only accelerators.

*Aix-les-Bains.*

The Lussons have been here for ten days. Their suite of rooms is on the same floor as mine, and we take our meals together at the restaurant. Thanks to this intimacy I am learning to know Josée better, and she delights me more and more. I am struck with the number of Irish and English traits in her character which I do not see in her mother. Race, like disease, frequently comes out only in the second or third generation. Mademoiselle de Lusson loves to make herself useful, to do things for others. Her kindness is prompt and spontaneous. I take my bath at half-past five in the morning. She gets up at five, prepares a small cup of tea with lemon, and brings it to me. She looks sweet in her thin white dressing-gown, through which one can distinguish the youthfulness and harmony of her figure. Her thick plait hangs down her back, and her hair is loose above the square, pure forehead still moist from sleep. The man who marries her will have reason to thank the gods.

Josée goes through the furnace in which we live like a true young girl. She certainly has a little of Eve's curiosity, though. The *demi-mondaines*, with their elegance and their jewellery, puzzle her. She calls them "the women with bad eyes." She does not understand their *rôle*, and is trying to find out what it is. When she looks at them, she draws her eyebrows together in a comic way, as though she had some problem to resolve. She has not time, fortunately, to dwell upon the

subject. In the morning she goes to the swimming-baths and then for a cycle ride. In the afternoon, when the concert is over, she goes up to the Splendide to tennis. She is a capital player. I hope that this providential tennis will create between her and Guy that comradeship which so frequently is the first manifestation of love. In the evening she is taken to the theatre whenever the play is possible. During the intervals she comes to talk to me on the terrace, and her fresh impressions give me great pleasure. And to think that we have to be old in order to realise what youth is.

I am getting into touch again with the good people of this part of the world, people whom I always liked very much indeed. I find them very little changed. They are less Savoyard, but not yet French. The native of Savoy has a very marked individuality. He is both rugged and gentle like his mountains; his character is rather difficult; he is alive to his own interests, proud, susceptible, obstinate, rebellious to progress. There is thorny brushwood to lift, but underneath a generous, idealistic and intuitive soul, a refined nature. Many of these distinctive traits are to be found among the people, particularly among the bathing men and women. Formerly the latter were simple peasants, the women were unaware of the power they had in their fingers, but they instinctively exercised it, thanks to their atavism. Now-a-days they call themselves professors, and fancy they are superior to the doctors. The massage under water which constitutes the *douche* at Aix is really unique. I realise now what an art there is in that gentle, and yet firm pressure which makes our muscles flexible again. I am grateful to Providence, and I have the utmost respect for the hands of these humble people, which are neither more nor less than the instruments of Providence, and which give me a

little of their strength and their life. Nearly all these bathing-women have intelligent faces. However mercenary they may be, the gratuity alone does not suffice to make them like their patients, but when they do like them they put something more into the massage. When they are resting, they put on a picturesque cloak of rough, black cloth with a cape, which they cut out for themselves, and, curiously enough, this is now the latest fashion. The bathing establishment has now become very grand. There is quite an army of attendants, and a very smart hall-porter who speaks English. I could not help smiling when I noticed that the people of Aix have divided their streets in order to multiply them and to be able to give more names to them. Every ten yards there is now a fresh street. There is, of course, the Avenue Pierpont Morgan and Georges I Street. The American millionaire and the King of Greece are very popular, not only because they leave money to the country, but because, in some occult way, they have won the favour of the crowd. The native of Savoy was Piedmontese with something of the Italian in him. He does not care for the person who loves him or who does him any good turn; he only cares for any one who is congenial to him.

Aix-les-Bains has tea-rooms, of course. I have just discovered a new one in the Place Carnot. It is kept by two young English women. The tables, with green marble tops, the cane-bottomed chairs, as plain as Chippendales, the brown tea-services, give to the whole a touch of originality and British Puritanism which has a certain charm. Flowers relieve the severity, the tea is perfect, and the warm, buttered scones delicious. "My boy" will appreciate them. "My boy!" I often call him this now, for the appellation expresses just the sentiment of maternal and feminine affection that

I feel for him. I am anxious to see him again, and I wonder in what state of mind he will arrive. I am counting on his automobile for taking baths of mountain air. The Aix air, filled from morning to night with the music of the Villa des Fleurs, the tam-tam of the Folies-Aixoises, the railway whistle, which the echo of the surrounding mountains repeats, tires me horribly. Yesterday, a dear friend, whom I had met again here, took me to Chante-Merle, a village on the heights. The silence did me so much good that I did not want to come down again. Evidently I am too old for *bamboulas*.

*Aix-les-Bains.*

Guy arrived sooner than I expected him. When I expressed my surprise at this, he put his arm round my neck.

"I can't do without you now, god-mother," he said, drawing me towards him.

Then, standing back to read my face, he continued —

"You are not sorry to see me again, are you?"

"I rather think that your absence seemed long to me," I answered, not without some emotion.

"That's all right!"

His face clouded over with sudden sadness.

"'Les Rocheilles' is so cold now. No more beautiful dark eyes; no more affectionate smiles; no pretty silk rustlings. It wants a mother, it wants a woman," he added, turning a little pale. "I hadn't the strength of mind to stay any longer, so here I am."

He had come in two days through the Jura and without a breakdown, with Louis, of course. By my advice he put up at the Splendide. The presence of Josée at the Palace Hôtel made that arrangement seem better. He joined our circle, of course. The vague resemblance

between Madame de Lusson and his mother struck him, as it had me, and awakened his interest. The ice between him and my little friend was broken at once by the words which came to my lips, I do not know how.

"Here is some one who has a serious grudge against you," I said to the latter.

"Who has a grudge against me?"

Josée looked at Guy with wide-open eyes.

"Yes, because you are now the mistress of Chavigny. As Monsieur de Myères' god-son, and as second cousin by marriage, M. de Hauterive thinks he has more right to it than you, and he declares that you have cut the ground from under his feet."

"I am sorry that I do not regret it," answered Mademoiselle de Lusson, mischievously.

"Anyhow, if one of these days you should be tempted to sell your estate, you will know where to find a purchaser, and you will at least give him the preference."

"To sell it? Oh, never!"

To my secret delight I saw the spirit of teasing come into "my boy's" eyes.

"Who knows? I shall go on hoping," he answered, tranquilly.

"Oh, as to that, I have no objection."

"You are very kind."

These words, pronounced in a mocking tone, produced a gaiety which seemed to me of good omen. I had never seen my god-son among strangers. He is neither awkward nor shy. He always seems to show to the best advantage, and his manners are perfect. Much of his refinement is due, I am sure, to the influence of Madame de Mauriones. One can tell a man among a hundred who owes his initiation to a woman of good birth, rather than to a mere society woman. Guy appears to be very gay; he is trying to make me

believe that he has completely recovered his self-mastery. I am not taken in by appearances, though. The day before yesterday I was watching him without his knowledge. He was leaning back in an arm-chair, on the terrace of the Club, with an unread newspaper on his knees, his head rather thrown back, his eyes half-closed under the turned-down brim of his hat. He appeared to be dreaming or dozing, and on his face there was such an expression of sadness, and in his whole attitude such discouragement, that I was touched by it to the very depths of my soul. I moved away discreetly without approaching him. He does not want commonplace consolations. I constantly see some of the pretty women of the Villa des Fleurs prowling round him, trying to attract his attention, even in my presence. It always leaves him visibly cold. Love, offered in a common cup, cannot tempt his lips which have drunk, for the first time, from a cup of gold. The state of mind in which he now is seems to render him inaccessible. I am afraid lest Josée should fall in love with him and he should not care for her. Heaven preserve me from being the instrument of such grief for my little friend. Nothing would ever console me for that. This thought keeps me awake half the night. Will he notice her hair that grows so prettily, her Irish eyes, her elegant figure? Will he notice? Everything depends on that.

*Aix-les-Bains.*

What subtlety in the working out of our destiny! This afternoon the rain, a veritable Aix *douche*, had made tennis impossible. My god-son and I had taken tea on the terrace of the Club.

"Do you know," I said, looking at the people grouped about here and there, "that I have never seen any

French people here with a book or a review in their hands."

"Aix is not precisely favourable for reading."

"Agreed, but look at all those English people deep in their novels. I believe that, after the Italian and Spanish, we are the people who read the least. It is rather discouraging for writers. The other day, though, I had a pleasant surprise. I saw a young man near me reading — guess what?"

"One of Jean Noël's novels?"

"No, silly boy," I answered, smiling. "He was reading *Jocelyn*, by Lamartine! *Jocelyn*, under the shade of the Villa des Fleurs, a few steps away from the baccarat tables and from a crowd of pretty women! I at once looked to see whether the reader were deformed or lame. No, he was even very handsome, but he had a poet's forehead, dreamy eyes, and long, slender hands. He was smoking his cigarette leisurely, and on his smooth lips I could see something of the emotion that I had once experienced myself. I could have kissed him."

Guy drew himself up, his eye sparkling with fun.

"God-mother, I must buy this *Jocelyn*," he said.

"Buying it is not everything; you must be capable of feeling it."

"You think I have not the necessary bumps," he said, taking off his hat, "and that my fingers do not taper enough?"

"Perhaps not," I answered, smiling.

"Very well, we will see," he remarked, stung to the quick.

"Joking apart, I don't know any book which gives such a sensation of true love."

"A sensation of true love!" repeated my god-son, with an ironical vibration in his voice. "Ah, I'll treat myself to that! Where can I get this precious book?"

"At Cartier's, Rue des Bains."

"I'll go at once."

And he started, leaving me quite aghast at the effect of my words.

*Jocelyn!* Ah, the divine accumulator! It was by it that I had had the sensation of love long before knowing it. Every time that I have read it since, even last year, it communicated to me the same warmth, the same emotion. By touching it only, as if a peculiar fluid emanated from it, my very fingers are affected by it. Is Providence about to employ this agent for touching Guy's heart once more? Nothing is too small for the greatness of Providence.

*Aix-les-Bains.*

*E fatto il miracolo!* as the priest says, when showing the Neapolitan people the liquified blood of St. Janvier. The miracle is accomplished! Guy, I believe, has noticed "the hair that grows so prettily, the Irish eyes, and the elegant figure" of my little friend. The admiration of another man opened his eyes. The way is as classic as Nature itself, but some variety is always introduced. I was lucky enough to be present and to witness the phenomenon. It seemed to me very pretty.

My god-son, who has no rheumatism, goes in the early morning to bathe in the lake, like a young god, and towards ten o'clock he arrives at the Palace Hôtel with his automobile and takes us, the Lussons and me, for a drive in the environs. Josée, to whom Madame de Lusson willingly gives up her seat, is getting more and more devoted to this sport, which she thinks more exciting than cycling. She does not fail to express our delight to our driver, but he only smiles vaguely. I am quite aware that the chauffeur always belongs too much to his machine to be able to

think of anything else. He is always more or less intoxicated with speed and air; I have therefore given up my afternoon excursions, and sent my two young people to tennis. A real mother could not be worse. There is at present a brilliant team of women and, thanks to the presence of three good men players, the game is more interesting than usual. Yesterday I went with my little friend. The tennis-ground, the trellis of which is covered with wild vines, makes a charming frame for all these active young people dressed in white. Seated in the shade, I watched the game with interest. How much race and character can be distinguished in sports! The French girl, whether she takes the ball straight or backhanded or when it is down, or whether she is serving even a hard service, is always graceful, and never dislocates herself like the English girl. Her well-cut dress always seems to harmonise with the rhythm of her movements. During the intervals she is a living poem of the most varied and charming attitudes. Ah, she really knows how to make the most of herself! The Frenchwoman is the woman for the intervals of life, as well as of tennis.

Mademoiselle de Lusson was my god-son's adversary. On both sides the game was well played, but the victory was in the latter's camp. Guy at once came to me. He looked very handsome in his flannels, with the excitement of combat and the pleasure of triumph on his face.

A few steps away from us were two Englishmen who, with a conscious air of superiority in sport, had followed the last phases of the game.

"Deuced pretty girl over there, holding her racket behind her back. Plays a good game, too. English, I bet," said one of them.

"Oh! she is French enough! Where are your eyes?

Look at her figure, and her dress too. Parisian make, I should say," answered the other.

"Well, if she is not English, she ought to be — Deuced pretty girl."

With this twice repeated compliment the two Englishmen moved away. They had said their say, played their little *rôle*, no doubt. Thanks to the suggestion in their words, I saw Guy's eyes wander towards Mademoiselle de Lusson and suddenly shine, as though they had been touched by an inward flame. It was only a flash, but that flash was reflected within me.

"You heard?" I said, smiling to my companion. "Is it not curious that young John Bull should have recognised his race in Mademoiselle de Lusson?"

"By her attitude, no doubt. She often puts her hands behind her back like English girls. I took it for a rather wicked bit of coquetry on her part; it is, perhaps, only atavism."

"No doubt of it. Her eyes, for instance, are certainly Irish."

"You think so."

Josée, to whom I had beckoned, came to us. Guy looked at her with a new curiosity, as if to see what there was Irish in her eyes.

"Let us go?" I said, "it is getting late; we shall scarcely have time to change our dresses."

My god-son went with us some little way along the road, and when he stopped to take leave of us, he said mischievously, raising his hat to my little friend —

"Homage to the vanquished."

"Who will be the conqueror to-morrow," she replied good-humouredly.

I looked up and saw that we were exactly opposite the house where M. de Myères and I had lived. These words of consolation and hope, just where the very

atmosphere was full of his memory, seemed to me prophetic. Deeply moved, and amazed as well, I went down the hill saying to myself: *E fatto il miracolo.*

*Aix-les-Bains.*

No, I was not mistaken. Everything has happened to confirm the impression I had on the Splendide tennis-ground. I have a deep conviction that the work for which I was sent here is accomplished. Will it lead to the union that I desire? *Chi lo sa?* How wise and deep it is, that Italian phrase!

Guy openly seeks the society of Mademoiselle de Lusson. It has amused him to draw her out, to make her talk, and, in a bantering way, the cleverness of which has not been lost on me, he has led her on to reveal herself. The revelation has rather charmed him, I think. He expressed his surprise to me on discovering in her that fine instinct of altruism which broadens not only our views, but life itself.

"Marriage will soon bring her down to the common level," he added. "At the end of two years of married life, young women who have received a higher education have forgotten everything. I am not the only one to have noticed this."

"That is not the fault of marriage, but of the husband. An American once expressed his surprise to me on seeing that the wife in France has so little social existence, and seems still to be the property of the husband, his chattel. I could not deny it. I hope that my little friend will find a companion intelligent enough to cultivate her individuality instead of trying to lessen it."

"Amen, god-mother," he answered, with an enigmatic smile.

On Tuesday something very curious happened. We

had just arrived by automobile at Annecy, Monsieur de Lusson, his daughter and I. We were walking by the lake whilst lunch was being prepared at the Hôtel de Verdun et de Genève. Guy suddenly began to walk on ahead of us, and Josée, by an irresistible impulse, I am sure, imitated him, so that for about a hundred yards they were walking along side by side, as though on the way to some distant goal. I saw Monsieur de Lusson frown and watch them with a vexed look. To my great relief the girl suddenly stopped, turned round and waited for us.

"We are going on as though we wanted to leave you," she said, with a pretty confusion.

"I think speed is contagious," added Guy, not without some embarrassment. "When one gets out of an automobile, it seems as though one must run instead of walk."

"It has not that effect on us, the automobile, has it, Madame de Myères?" said my companion in a mocking tone.

"Alas, no," I replied, with deep regret.

Neither of the two young people had any idea of the force which had brought them together at that moment, but I had guessed what it was.

On Thursday I invited the Lussons, some other friends, and my god-son to tea at the little English tea-shop, Place Carnot. Out of pure psychological curiosity I asked Josée to pour. She did so with her customary ease. I noticed that she prepared Guy's tea much more slowly, and that her fingers lingered over this task as though they found a secret pleasure in it. When she passed him his cup there was astonishment mingled with anxiety in her eyes, and at the corner of her lips an excited smile. She could not have explained all this herself, probably. She will have many other surprises, this little friend of mine;

but in the mean time I feel sure about her state of mind.

As to Guy, it seemed to me that his face lighted up, that the sap of youth, which for a time had been arrested, had been revived within him. The unusual weather which we are having has made me give up my journey to Switzerland, so that he has decided to go alone to Dauphiny. In order to draw him again within our circle where, I think, he might find happiness, I asked him to come to Tours towards the end of October, to take me to the *Châteaux* on the Loire and then back to Paris.

His face lighted up with youthful joy, but there was a suspicious colour too.

"God-mother, you are a veritable well of good ideas," he exclaimed. "I neither know Loches, Chenonceaux nor Amboise."

"Well, then, we will see them together," I said, smiling; "and so that they may be more living, I advise you to read up the epoch again in Henri Martin's *History of France*."

"I will read it, yes, I will certainly read it," he replied with enthusiasm. "Do you know that it is the reading of your *Jocelyn* which made me want to see Dauphiny? I shall take it with me. If I should die on the road, people will be very much surprised to find that poem of Lamertine's in the portmanteau of an automobilist. You are right," he added in a more serious voice, "it contains the very essence of love."

"Of pure love. Certainly the drink would be dangerous for a boarding-school girl, but I think it is good for a young man."

"And although I have not a poet's forehead, nor long, slender hands, I appreciate the flavour of it."

"So much the better, my dear boy," I answered, smiling at him and his wounded vanity.

Yes, he has gone to the Dauphiny mountains, and the

intangible, invisible force which made him turn his machine in that direction was a ray from the soul of Lamartine. How beautiful Life is!

We all went up to the Splendide to be there for his departure. He seemed to be quite touched by that. After shaking hands cordially, he stepped brusquely into his quivering machine. With his left hand on the steering-wheel, he turned round, raised his hat to us again, and his last look went straight, not to god-mother — but to Josée! God-mother now retired to the background! Still another little move, and, like the marionettes of beloved memory, she will disappear altogether. Ah, well, Life is always beautiful!

*Aix-les-Bains.*

Aix has completely changed. The fine birds of prey have flown away to Biarritz; the fashionable women have returned to their *châteaux* or villas. The brilliant waves have disappeared with them, the picture has become dull, the movement has slackened. There is still a noise, but no more hubbub. An American woman said to me yesterday, with that frank way of speaking which amuses me, "Aix has become disgustingly respectable." It is true, serious people lack electricity, they have not the joyous effervescence of champagne, but rather the quiet strength of Burgundy. When men of science are able to decompose the moral elements, of which we are constituted, they will have some fine surprises. I leave this evening, and am not going direct to Touraine, but to Normandy, as a kind and pressing invitation has come to me from there. The noise, the heat and my tension of mind have caused me such fatigue that I feel in desperate need of the country and of quiet. The Lussons wanted to come back here for me from Thonon, where they have gone to pay a short visit before returning home, but I objected to this.

According to an old habit I went to take leave of the places and things which had given me pleasure. I said a long farewell to the beloved villa on the hill. I went up to the Boulevard des Côtes and to that of La Roche-du-Roy to see the little valley again, to feel once more that effect of light which gives to these mountains and to the lake a voice, a soul, a subtle and living charm, such as I have never met with elsewhere. On coming down again I looked for a few moments with wonder and gratitude at a certain group, signed by Geoffroy, placed at the entrance to the park. It represents a lion lying lazily down; the lioness is exciting it to play by offering it the top of her head, which it licks gravely, its eyes half closed in happiness. This wild beast's kiss, is it very zoological? This I do not know, but such deep sentiment emanates from it, and such strength of love, that, every morning on passing it on my way to the baths, it gave my old woman's heart a ray of warmth, a sensation of great affection. Am I not right in saying that every work of art is destined to maintain and propagate Life on earth?

This evening I shall bid farewell to the Palace Hôtel, to the few persons with whom I have made acquaintance, to Françoise, my Savoy maid. How many farewells I have said and heard during the last sixteen years!

## IX

### PORTE-JOIE

*Porte-Joie.*

A SMALL village of one hundred and fifty inhabitants, on the left bank of the Seine and on the borders of a huge fertile plain, in the midst of wonderful scenery; a village which is only two hours and a half by rail from Paris, but which leads nowhere. Neither a poor person, a tramp nor a mere stroller is ever to be met with there. It is a place only known to artists, a place where Daubigny planted his tent. A year ago I did not know of its existence. The Will which has made my destiny so fantastic, arranged, last winter, for me to make the acquaintance of the owner of the only villa in the village, and a cordial, affectionate invitation has brought me here. I cannot describe the pleasure I felt on finding, at the station of St. Pierre-du-Vouvray, not an omnibus, but a farmer's trap, drawn by a regular country priest's donkey, so strong and plump. As soon as I was in this free expanse of open country I had a sense of restfulness and well-being. The house, preceded by what is called "a Norman courtyard," that is, a meadow planted with apple-trees, made an agreeable impression on me. Its verandah is fringed with wild vine and its walls covered with fruit-trees. The interior of the house is very congenial. No pretentious drawing-room, but a cheerful, light studio, its wide bay windows opening on the Seine. Here and there the artist is

revealed by a piece of sculpture, a picture, tapestry, and the arrangement of the flowers. In my room, which is as long as a picture-gallery, I have the morning, mid-day and evening light. With its five windows, my room takes in nearly the whole of the horizon, from the pretty Herqueville beach on the other bank of the river, to the hills that bound the plain. Under my windows is a garden full of roses, opposite to me the steeple of the old church, and quite near a tree inhabited by black-caps, tom-tits and goldfinches, who give me the joy of their little lives. I felt a childish pleasure in seeing the boats of the Navigation Co. going up and down the Seine, and I never tire of admiring the neatness of their storage. I had not had such entertainment for a long time.

My hostess, who is very much occupied, and also very tactful, leaves me free to wander at my fancy. I have been for some long walks along the river and across the plain, drinking in with delight that keen, sweet air which seems to have been specially prepared for my lungs. On the way I had fragments of amusing conversation with old peasant women, and I noticed, not without pleasure, that animals are better under-stood and better treated than formerly. One could tell that, too, by their gentleness. I often stopped to say a friendly word to the beautiful Normandy cows, to the pretty heifers, and all of them appeared sensitive to the caressing tone of my voice. I am on very good terms with a troop of geese which sport about every morning in the Seine and attend to their toilette on the grassy banks. The first day, the sight of me alarmed them all, the second day they put up with me, and now they know me perfectly well. How good and restful all this is after the season of Aix-les-Bains. I must say, though, that Porte-Joie does not justify its name. It is

ideally pretty, but has nothing exhilarating; it is curiously cold. Built on the banks of the river, it has no depth, and only extends lengthwise. Its farms have not the picturesqueness of the former dwellings of the peasants. They are new houses of *bourgeois* aspect, with manure-heaps and poultry-yards. The Municipal school is as ugly here as it is everywhere else. Then Porte-Joie is not a religious place, and the inhabitants do not go much to Church. On Sunday, at Mass, there were five persons, " one of whom was a man," as Footit would say. There is, therefore, no resident priest. The presbytery is let to railway employés. The old Church, which turns its apsis towards the Seine, is closed all the week. Its silent steeple neither rings the Angelus nor the *fête* days. One would say that in this part of the world people are neither born, nor do they marry nor die. The peasants have hard, even hostile faces. They do not salute strangers like the Touraine peasants. Along the roads of the Norman plain one meets handsome young men with blue eyes and clearly modelled features. They remind one of certain Englishmen of old race who, probably, have the same ancestors as these Normans.

The increase of luxury and comfort is perceptible here as elsewhere. The baby-children and the little girls all have a scrap of ribbon to tie up their hair. Yesterday I met a child of fourteen. She was very well dressed, and in one hand she had a book, while with the other she held the ropes of three cows that she was taking to the field. This seemed to me very characteristic of our epoch, and I smiled at this progress.

Before disappearing behind the heights of Gaillon, the sun sends some of its rays over the river, flashes bands of gold, silver and of that green called in heraldry sinople. Just above the Herqueville shore it

touches some rocks, which seem to have been left bare in order to receive its kiss when setting, and this marvellous illumination only produces sadness. Why is this? This Seine is very wide here, and, divided by islands, it looks like a grand old river. On moonlight nights it has a powerful effect. The woody slope of the opposite bank throws fantastic shadows on to it. At a certain turning one expects to see, not barges, and still less towing boats, but *pirogues*, and twice I have felt, when standing at my window, the thrill of a far-distant past. No, Porte-Joie is not gay, and yet the fortnight's halt that I have just had here has seemed to me delightful, refreshing and very short — too short, alas, for to-morrow I must go away. I am now feeling the fatigue of all that I have lived through during the year that has just gone by. My mind and body have never ceased to be under high pressure, and they are now beginning to need rest. At times I am tempted to return to Paris, to take refuge in my rooms at the Hôtel de Castiglione and not to leave them again. Apparently there is nothing to prevent my doing this, but I know very well that my Vouvray friends, the Lussons, Josée, Guy, Colette's wish, my own desire to finish my work, are only mediums of that providential Will which is sending me to Touraine. I feel, nevertheless, within me a vague resistance. The thought of the little journey alarms me; I am not sufficiently rested, probably. Then, too, I shall regret my hostess, this home which has really been "a good resting-place," and my large room full of light. I shall regret Jean-Jean, the cat, and its pretty purring; Jeanette, the ass which has taken me out so patiently and so philosophically, saluting me always with a joyous bray. Of what use are regrets? They help to make Life, I fancy.

The Porte-Joie evenings are melancholy, but the

dawns are radiant. I wanted to enjoy one for the last time, and this morning I opened my window before six o'clock and was deeply impressed by the beauty of the picture before me. The sun had just risen above the Herqueville slope; the sky was absolutely clear; the Seine rosy and without a single eddy. In the peaceful air, of such dewy transparency, hundreds of swallows formed a living whirlwind, describing circles above the garden, around the trees and the steeple, skimming against each other's beaks as though to exchange a word. This lasted five minutes, and then I saw them rise very high and disappear, leaving silence behind them. Dear little sisters! They are sent away very far. Their mission is over yonder, in Africa, in Australia. The itinerary of their course is traced, perhaps, in some cell of their brain; their slight bodies, their nerved wings, possess that power of movement which man is seeking, but through the wind and tempest they are sustained by another force still, the intangible, invisible force of their destiny. They are just like us, and we are just like them in this particular. They are not afraid, because they are ignorant of everything; we are afraid, because we do not know enough.

# X

## TOURAINE

*Vouvray, Touraine.*

This is the eleventh year that I have returned to Vouvray and to the same roof. I made the acquaintance of my hosts at Vouvray in a casual and droll way. One evening, after dinner, I was seated on the lounge of the Hôtel des Ambassadeurs, waiting for it to be time to go to the Casino, when a tall gentleman stopped quite near me to light a cigar. A flower-seller who was roaming about there, thinking that we were together, rushed at once to him and, with the tactics that succeed nine times out of ten, said —

"Buy these beautiful roses for Madame!"

I coloured with anger, and sharply ordered the poor girl to go away. Monsieur A——, very much amused at my confusion, could not resist the tantalising pleasure of increasing it by purchasing the roses. Then, raising his hat, he presented them to me.

"Madame, I have no right to offer you them," he said in a good-natured way. "Please accept them all the same, if only to help me out of a difficulty."

I could not help laughing, and, disarmed by the ludicrousness of the situation, I took the magnificent bunch of flowers he was holding out to me.

A few minutes later, Madame A—— joined her husband, and, finding him in conversation with an unknown woman, gave me the most cutting glance I have

ever received. I hastened to explain the incident to her, and it amused her.

"I am very much surprised," she then said to him, "that you should have had such a happy idea!"

"I, too, my love," he replied placidly.

The comic note of this fragment of conjugal dialogue struck me and amused me inwardly. The conversation we exchanged afterwards continued to break the ice between us with surprising rapidity, considering our respective characters. A flower-seller from Vichy was thus the unconscious agent of our acquaintanceship. Her little phrase, for which I had snubbed her, was to give me some very good friends. It has brought me over and over again to Touraine, and its effect still lasts. This is a fair sample of the web of life.

Among the halts which Providence has prepared for me, that of Vouvray has been one of the sweetest and most restful. The house of my hosts is just at the entrance of the village. It is preceded by a courtyard which attracts the gaze of all the passers-by, as it is so picturesque with its walls covered with creepers, and its borders of brilliant flowers, its old sycamore, and its well, encircled with verdure. When its iron gates open to me I have the sensation of shelter and of kindly hospitality. It is very agreeable to see the pleasant faces of the servants, to hear the purr of welcome from the cat, Mirette, who always recognises my voice. I am always delighted to find myself in the blue room with its soft bed. The arm-chairs and other chairs of the room have been embroidered by three generations of women. The house is charming, sufficiently provincial to have a character of its own, modern enough to be very comfortable. I have watched with curiosity the introduction of the new spirit and of more modern taste in this interior. The appearance of a hundred

little innovations has made its aspect less stiff, more particularly the flowers and light which are to be seen everywhere now. The garden, which is curious, like all those here, is on the other side of the street, and is joined to the house by a subterranean passage. It has a magnificent thicket of chestnuts, a terrace planted with trees, among which are two monumental yews, male and female, then lower down a regular country priest's garden, with vegetables, fruits, box-wood borders and simple flowers. I enjoy watching the working of the wheels of this well-ordered household, it reminds me of my old home.

I look inside the cupboards filled with linen, the store-room so richly provided with fruit, the niches hollowed in the rock where the wine grows old. I visit the granaries, even, for I adore granaries. Often, on returning from my walk, I enter the beautiful kitchen, brilliant with ripolin and copper, to say a word to Constance, the most amiable of cooks that I have ever met. I approach the huge fire-place to see the wood flaming, the soup simmering and the spit turning. All these prosaic things make part of a home and interest me now. They have a certain poetry in my eyes. They take me back to domestic life, to my past. And that past, which I disdained when it was present, is ever uppermost now in my soul and is very sweet to me. It seems as though man is an animal which must turn round before he can see aright.

*Vouvray.*

Porte-Joie has made me feel more deeply still the charm of this little country on the banks of the Loire. Vouvray is not laic! And how could it be, under this Touraine sky of such a soft blue, in this atmosphere vibrating with light, with the beautiful Château of

Moncontour ennobling the whole scenery with its past, and with the generous wine of its slopes, with its refined and handsome race of people? How picturesque it is too! Vine-covered rocks hollowed out, bored through with doors and windows, inhabited as in the olden times, and at the foot rustic houses, elegant villas. Here one lives in the rock and of the rock. The mason and the architect have been inspired to respect the rock everywhere. Instead of knocking it down and levelling it, they have made use of its ruggedness. They have created irregular paths, curious little gardens, goat steps. This unique configuration is, I think, fertile in surprises, and makes the walks all around singularly interesting. On the heights it is not a rare thing to see a chimney emerging from the bushes; the village steeple looks as though it were coming out of the ground. From the garden of my friends, the statue of the Virgin, placed over the large door of the church, seems to hover in the blue sky. By moonlight their courtyard has a fantastic aspect. A number of dwellings have rooms and out-buildings in the rock, subterranean places which make cellars worthy of the heroes of Rabelais, where the Vouvray wine has the silence that it needs in order to grow old properly. The aristocratic part of the village is on the heights. Its street is bordered on one side by white houses, all different from each other, and by a pretty church; on the other side by gardens which go down in slopes and terraces to the road. I have never seen anywhere else walls that are so picturesque and so covered with flowers. They give one an oppressive feeling; there are too many of them. One feels the need of escaping from them, and so one climbs up on to the plateau. When once there one feels absolutely free. There is an immense horizon and plenty of fresh air, so that

when walking through the beautiful vines one feels the gladness of life. Monumental flights of steps lead to the Château of Moncontour, a military stronghold of the fifteenth century which stands on the heights. From its towers one no longer keeps watch on the country, but one admires it, which is what our fathers never thought of doing. And from there one has the pathetic sight of a dying river of the poor Loire choked by its beautiful violet sand. It is never dragged and is therefore dying slowly, in a dignified way, like a *grande dame*. There is scarcely even a living wave for the sun to light up on the Tours side, nothing but sombre lagoons. The other evening I felt grieved on noticing this, but I do not know whether I should like to see the towing boats of a Navigation Co. in its waters, passing in front of Blois. Such boats are more suitable for the democratic, commercial and industrial Seine. It may be that Nature is of my opinion. In my walks, revisiting old haunts, I never forget the Cisse bridge, so dear to Balzac, and there is another place that attracts me particularly, and that is the cemetery. I do not know another one like it. It is entirely bathed in light and sun, so that one could never be quite dead there. The wind has always sounded strange to me there, and I often go to listen to it.

Fortunately I have found the Convent of the Presentation still there. I was afraid that this little poetical place might have been done away with. It is a very humble house with the garden and school running downhill. Leaning over the wall one sees the sisters, dressed in black and white, coming and going with their light step. One sees, too, cats that are curiously black and white, as though the mother cats had received an impression from the colours of the Order.

The fresh voices of children can be heard, at times, singing a canticle or some old French song. Yesterday, as I was passing, the refrain of the *Chevalier de la Marjolaine* brought me to an abrupt halt. I repeated, mechanically, the words of the pretty song, and refreshing tears came to my eyes.

Vouvray, like the whole of Touraine, is melancholy, but there is a certain gentleness in its moral atmosphere. Its soul is certainly not laic. Laicism has its *raison d'être*, I suppose, but it is neither beautiful nor congenial.

I have been here nearly a fortnight, and have neither noticed the hours nor the days pass by; I have not even been tempted to go to Tours. This provincial life in the country has the great attraction of change to me. I have enjoyed the succulent luncheons and dinners which are the pride of my hostess. The golden wine of certain noted years is brought from the cellar, and the priest contributes his good humour and serenity to these meals, which are enlivened by gay and familiar conversation. We have played cards twice a day, worked, had tea under the chestnuts, and chatted a great deal. The comic note, which struck me at my first meeting with Madame A——, is to be heard constantly, and also sallies of wit which are the speciality of the Thuringian mind. All this causes me irresistible fits of gaiety. I laugh as I did at the age of twenty. I hear myself laughing, and that seems good to me. I had spoken to my friends of my quarrel with Madame d'Hauterive, my only relative, but without telling them the reason of it. I described to them in detail our meeting at Bagnoles and our reconciliation; I told them of my friendship for my pseudo-god-son, the way in which I had been led to make the acquaint-

ance of the Lussons, the owners of that "Commanderie" which they had pointed out to me one day on returning from the Rochefort Château.

"It is quite upsetting!" exclaimed Madame A——, her eyes wide open with interest.

"If we had time to observe Life we should often be upset," I answered, smiling.

"Well, I prefer keeping on my feet!" replied my very prosaic friend, promptly.

Upsetting, in truth, this epilogue! Upsetting, this affection that I feel for the son of Monsieur de Myères and Colette! I wonder what I should do now without that tall, authoritative young man coming to my rooms. I should miss him very much. He has been for a splendid tour through Dauphiny, and I am in a hurry to hear about it. He is at present at "Les Rocheilles." In his letters there is such juvenile effusion and such fresh warmth of love that I feel it all from here. He is impatient to come and join me, I feel sure of that, but I have the intuition that it is no longer god-mother alone who attracts him. So much the better, oh, so much the better! I shall never be quite a mother until I have known the pain of sacrifice.

*Commanderie de Rouziers.*

"A Louis XIII place patched up fairly well." This was Monsieur A——'s criticism of the house when he had first drawn my attention to it, little thinking that a few years later I was to receive such kind hospitality in it. It was here that the Lussons brought me a week ago. They came to Tours to fetch me, and I got out of the carriage of my friends to get into theirs. And what a warm welcome they gave me! On seeing me, my little friend's face flushed with pink. Was it Madame de Myères or Guy's god-mother who produced

this effect? It was very pretty, anyhow. The " Commanderie " is about seven miles from Tours and half-an-hour from the village of Rouziers. It does not look like a *château*, but there is a certain ancient strength about its massive architecture. It was no doubt part of a military benefice. The beautiful ivy covering of its right wing, the bright simple flowers which surround it on every side soften its aspect. The park area is admirably planted. All this will no doubt fall to the share of Josée's half-brother, who married the daughter of a rich Canadian banker last year and now lives at Montreal. The " Commanderie " has been " thoroughly patched up," and not only outwardly, as modern comforts have been introduced, with much art and respect, into the inside of the house, which is very comfortable. The atmosphere of it is not only due to the old furniture, the beautiful tapestries and family relics. One sees signs of intellectual and manual occupation everywhere, and these signs are not, as in so many houses, theatrical accessories. Warm wraps are crocheted with the balls of wool from the basket in one of the window recesses of the large drawing-room. Embroidery is done every day on the canvas stretched on the tapestry frame. There is a piano which is not silent. On the tables are reviews that are read; there is a library which is frequented; and there are large fire-places in which fires are lighted; foliage and flowers are arranged by skilful hands. There is, in short, real life about everything, and this makes itself felt. Certain houses, although inhabited, always look empty, others, even when empty, would look inhabited. That of the Lussons is among this number. In the rooms they have given me there is a beautiful view over the park and the country. The Randolphs had these rooms during their stay here. My bedroom is the one Sir

William occupied — I feel a melancholy joy in saying to myself that his eyes and his thoughts were attracted by the objects around me. There are family portraits which *parvenus* would consign to the attic, bulgy chests of drawers, comfortable arm-chairs, an immense bureau, a Louis XV toilet-table which is my delight, a wardrobe, with glass doors, full of those old books which I love to look through. My bed is in an alcove, and over it is a holy water vase and a branch of Easter palm. It is a delightful suite of rooms for a dowager. In the little drawing-room, hung with Beauvair tapestry, I feel as though I am a person of importance. My little friend has ornamented it with roses and chrysanthemums. Madame de Lusson informed me that she had constituted herself my hostess, and I could see that by her glance all round the room to be quite sure that nothing is wanting.

As soon as I arrived, I wanted to see Josée's boys. She took me to "The Cottage," as their little home is called. "The Cottage" is one of the out-buildings of the farm. A long, low house between an orchard and a kitchen garden. A Canadian vine climbs right up to its attics. Its little windows have curtains with red and white stripes, and are all decorated with plants. Two cats were attending to their toilet on rustic benches placed on either side of the door; a large sheep-dog was lying down on the threshold. It all had a warm, gay look. A queen, such as the Queen of England, would enjoy staying there!

Miss Jones came to meet us and was introduced to me. Her faded, fair hair, her ruddy complexion, together with her freckles and a turn-up nose, give her an ugliness that is thoroughly Saxon; but her extremely kind-looking blue eyes, her cheery expression, make her quite attractive. She has been a sort of

governess to Mademoiselle de Lusson. When, two years ago, her pupil gave herself a little family, she asked to be allowed to take charge of it, and courageously exiled herself in the country. A former nun, who belonged to one of the congregations under the ban of the French government acts as servant, and does the work of ten persons.

The interior of " The Cottage " delighted me. There are no steps, and one enters a room lighted by two windows, the brick floor is covered with mats, and there is a wooden staircase leading to the first floor. In this kind of hall the children take their meals, study and play. It is furnished with a large table, a dozen chairs and two straw arm-chairs. Some cupboards contain the books and the playthings, a large clock strikes the hours, and a stove warms it in winter. Parallel with this room, and looking on the garden, is a light, cheerful kitchen, and adjoining it the wash-house containing a bath. Each of the children's rooms has two little beds, two chests of drawers surmounted with a looking-glass, two desks and two chairs. The general wash-stand is provided with everything necessary. Miss Jones has very pretty rooms, a study down-stairs, and up-stairs a comfortable bedroom. Madame de Lusson has arranged an extra room for her, so that she can invite a friend. Amidst all this simplicity one recognizes Josée's taste. The china on the sideboard, although common, is pretty. On the enamel-painted walls of a delicate shade, there are engravings and pictures, pinned on under bands of Turkey-red twill; some rough pottery vases contain flowers and leaves. In the little house there is order and movement. Order without movement is icy cold. Open books, chairs in harness, a hundred odd things tell that children are there. The old furniture, brought down from the attics of the

"Commanderie," gives to the whole a home-like look. The children were at the end of the kitchen garden. Mademoiselle de Lusson put the silver whistle, which she wears as a charm, to her lips. When they all came running to her, calling out "God-mother, god-mother," she turned to me, saying, with a blushing smile —

"You see I am a god-mother, too!"

Her boys rushed to her and kissed her hands, then, on seeing me, they were disconcerted for a moment. I said a few words to them, and their little faces brightened again.

The two eldest are eight and nine years old, the younger ones six and seven. One of them drew from his pocket a little box, opened it as though it contained something precious, and said, presenting it to the young girl —

"God-mother, this is my tooth, I drew it out myself."

"That's right! Show me your mouth."

The child obeyed.

Josée examined the child's gums carefully.

"The other is there already," she said. "And so you are giving me this one?'

"Yes, and all the others."

The god-mother, touched by this, pressed the child's brown head against her.

The frank, open faces of the four little urchins reassured me. Cleanliness is in itself such elegance that they look as though they belong to a higher class of Society. I said this to my young friend.

"The two eldest ones were covered with vermin when I took them," she said; "now they have a horror of dirt. A few days ago Miss Jones heard piercing cries. She ran out and found Paul washing the farmer's daughter by force at the pump."

"And they have no parents?"

"No. Father made me promise only to adopt children with no family. Now that I love them I shudder to think of the fate they might have had. Poor little creatures! They look happy, don't they?"

"Happy! They beam with health and contentment," I answered in all sincerity.

During this visit I observed my little friend closely, but could not detect in her the slightest shade of affectation or of posing. Nothing, I am convinced, would make her give up her boys. She feels maternal pleasure in seeing them well, in bringing them up; she tries to find out their aptitudes; she thinks of their future. This is something that will keep a girl's heart pure and warm.

Country life is thoroughly understood at the "Commanderie." All morning, hosts and guests are entirely free. Luncheon is at eleven, tea at four and dinner at eight. This gives long afternoons for bridge, conversation, walks and drives. There are many country houses in the environs, and automobiles bring visitors every day. If my fate hal not been such a tragic one, I should have had, at Chavigny, a similar existence to that of Madame de Lusson. I should, like her, have had a well-sheltered home. This idea crossed my mind this morning while I was reading my *Figaro* under a tree in the park. The paper fell from my hands and, in the deep peace which surrounded me, I meditated for a long time. At Chavigny, Jean Noël would not have been born — Jean Noël, the companion of my old age! Providence took a great deal from me; it gave me still more, though, I think.

*Commanderie de Rouziers.*

I have driven to Tours, and have come back with an uneasy feeling which I hope will prove unfounded.

Saturday is the day for Tours; the residents of the environs meet there on that day. The streets are lined with brakes, phætons, elegant carriages and automobiles. Madame de Lusson goes regularly and receives her friends at the Hôtel de l'Univers, where she rents a drawing-room. Just before tea-time I went out to buy some toys for Josée's boys, and I walked about in the silent parts of the town which I specially love. In spite of its provincial spirit, its uncompromising bigots, the number of priests and nuns one meets there, Tours is not unpleasant. It is an aristocratic town, and hospitable. It has retained much of its light and gallant soul of former days. The eyes of the women, generally brown or black, have a light in them which is gay and provoking; there is a refined boldness in those of the men. They must be generous here, both with their love and money. I was careful not to miss Madame de Lusson's reception. When I arrived, there were already about fifteen persons there, substantial dowagers dressed in black trimmed with jet. They wore strings to their bonnets; their dull yellow complexions revealed their faulty hygiene; there were a few very pretty women, well dressed, but without any natural elegance. There were marriageable girls, too, stiff and awkward, and there were officers and country gentlemen. I once more had the opportunity of admiring the play of those general ideas which are the specialty of our race. The women who were there had no great culture; they probably read very little; their minds appeared to have run aground on a sand-bank, like the Loire; and yet they found something with which to aliment the conversation. The gossip was well told, in choice language seasoned with fine salt. Whilst listening to this conversation, I realised how useful and agreeable provincial life in France might be if prejudice and igno-

rance did not render it stagnant, and then I said to myself that Providence will surely use the drag for these intellects in its own good time. They form, perhaps, the counter-balance necessary, for our nation, to the movement of the "Wheel of Things."

The widow of a general, who had amused me by her sallies, began to talk of her son-in-law in eulogistic terms.

"If sons-in-law were elected every seven years, like the President of the Republic," she added, "I should choose Robert again."

This assertion of maternal authority gave me a start.

"Your daughter would have a voice in the matter this time, I suppose," said a little woman with a mischievous face.

"My daughter!" repeated the General's wife, as though she had forgotten that factor; "oh, she has always done as I wish. It has suited her very well, too, for she is perfectly happy."

I caught a flash in my little friend's eyes. Evidently she would not have suffered any one to dispose of her fate in this way. This reflection made me notice how much the foreign element within her came out among these provincial women. In her words, in her manner there was marked individuality. She appeared to be in full possession of the liberty of speaking and thinking, but she did not abuse that liberty. The guests were profuse in their friendly overtures to the heiress, but there was a certain mistrust perceptible. They watched her move about in the room, they were observing and criticising her to themselves. She began to pour the tea and chocolate. A very handsome young lieutenant was eager to help her in the passing of cups and cakes. I soon began to feel very anxious as though the general impression had communicated itself to me. I was sure

that there was marriage in the air. Josée seemed to me embarrassed; the mother of the young man was talking to her in an affectionate and familiar way. I wondered if I were on the wrong track, and this thought gave me a terrible pang. I was in a hurry for the reception to come to an end, so that I might indirectly confess the young girl. As soon as we were in the carriage, Josée said to me in an indignant way —

"Did you hear that odious woman? She married her daughter, in order to keep her near to herself, to a neighbour, a good sort of man, well educated, but as dull as ditch-water."

"Oh, there are still some girls who allow themselves to be married by their parents," said Madame de Lusson, trying to put on a severe air.

"And there are some parents who are not selfish," answered my little friend, raising her mother's hand to her lips.

This reassured me for an instant, then the remembrance of the handsome lieutenant came to my mind to disquiet me. I recalled the way in which every one had watched the two young people and I was sure that every one had decided on their marriage.

Before going to bed Josée comes to pay me a little visit in my room. She arrives in her nightdress and dressing-gown, her bare feet in pretty sandals. She sits down on a low chair, or on the ground before the fire-place, where my wood fire is burning, and talks to me.

Out of loyalty to my hosts, I always scrupulously avoid talking of my god-son, but Josée always finds a way of mentioning his name, of bringing him forward. She has to go an immense way round sometimes, and I laugh slyly at her skill. This evening she spoke to me of our automobile drive to the Dent du Chat.

"By the bye," I asked her, "who is the young man who helped you with the tea this afternoon?"

"Count Morziers, mamma's candidate," she answered, shaking her beautiful mane with a gesture of revolt.

"But he is very nice," I said, wickedly.

At this unexpected approbation from me, an approbation which seemed to put Guy out of the question, her face darkened instantaneously. I have never seen a face on which unhappiness is so visible, it covers it like a cloud. She fixed her grey eyes on me with an expression of astonishment, then looking at the flame in the fire, she said —

"Yes, he is very nice; he is the best match in the whole country even. Unfortunately, he is too fond of his profession as a soldier to give it up, and I will never consent to live in a moving camp. I want a fixed home."

This time my fears vanished. I felt remorseful for having caused a doubt that was painful in my little friend's heart. I noticed that a sudden discouragement seemed to have taken the life out of her. Conversation dragged, and in her "good-night" I felt a shade of coldness. I patted her shoulder in a friendly way and said —

"Let us hope that Providence will send us what we both desire, a good master for Chavigny."

"Yes, let us hope so," she said gravely.

*Commanderie de Rouziers.*

And whilst I was feeling so anxious, *my* candidate arrived with all the speed of his fifteen horse-power. This afternoon he dropped down upon us like a veritable thunderbolt. My hosts were paying a round of visits. I was with Josée at "The Cottage." While waiting for the tea and scones, which Miss Jones was

preparing for us, my little friend was playing quoits with her two elder boys. Lying back in a garden arm-chair, with a cat on my knees, I was watching the gossamer threads floating in the air, and wondering for the hundreth time from whence they came. The weather was specially fine, the atmosphere transparent as in the early days of autumn, and all around us was something of a dominical peace. All at once Top, the watch-dog, and the two fox-terriers, burst into furious barks, and rushed towards the end of the orchard as though they were possessed.

"A visitor," I said.

Josée turned around, and, to our stupefaction, we saw Guy in the midst of the three barking, jumping, protesting dogs. The cat jumped down and put her back up. I rose, and before I knew where I was my god-son had kissed me.

"Where have you come from?" I exclaimed at last.

"Out of my auto, god-mother, and from Tours."

With this reply, uttered in an easy way, he approached Mademoiselle de Lusson. Their eyes met, they shook hands, their faces were touched by invisible light. That lasted a second, enough to edify me. Jean Noël caught the whole picture — the sunny cottage, Miss Jones coming forward, a teapot in one hand, a plate of hot cakes in the other, the table set under a bower and decorated with flowers, the children, and then the dogs scenting the visitor, Josée standing up in the foreground, nervously stroking the head of one of her boys, and looking most charming in her short dress of grey cloth, woven in Tuscany, her well-cut jacket, her chemisette of cream silk, her hat of soft felt with a wide brim. Truly Providence frames its personages well, but we take no notice of this.

"Will you explain to me," I said to Guy, "how it is that you are in Touraine on the tenth of October when you were not to come before the twenty-fifth?"

"I know; but I could not wait until the twenty-fifth, that's all."

"A fine reason," I said, partially disarmed.

"The real one," replied my boy, tranquilly.

"Where have you left your automobile?" asked Josée, who had recovered from her emotion.

"At the 'Commanderie.' They told me that Monsieur and Madame de Lusson were out driving, and they also told me where I should find you."

"It would have served you right if we had been absent, too," I said.

"As hostess, I protest," said my little friend, gaily. "I am delighted to be able to offer a cup of tea to Monsieur d'Hauterive."

"One would think that he had been attracted by the smell of the scones, which he used to eat so eagerly in the tea-rooms at Aix-les-Bains," I said, smiling.

"I have certainly been attracted by something," replied the young man audaciously, "for I have driven nearly all the time at the maximum rate."

By what process these simple words brought a shade of deep pink to Josée's face, I do not know; that is Nature's secret!

How the presence of a man fills a place! There seemed to be ten times more life and gaiety now than before. My little friend had never appeared so attractive to me. The simplicity of her English costume gave her a charming ease of manner. The brim of her hat turning up in front, *à la Polaire*, showed her forehead and the irreproachable line of the golden hair right to the roots. I caught the scared look of Miss Jones, glancing from one to the other of the two young people.

That look made me suddenly feel the indiscretion of this unexpected arrival of my god-son. I wondered what the Lussons would think of it. Just at that moment we heard the sound of a carriage.

"Papa and mamma!" exclaimed Josée. "They, too, have smelt the scones. Quick, some fresh tea, Miss Jones!"

I rose promptly and, accompanied by Guy, went to meet my hosts. With an exclamation of surprise, they held out their hands to him cordially. In their extremely kind welcome there was a shade of embarrassment which did not escape me. That irritated me with the culprit.

"You have not come to fetch your god-mother, I hope," said Madame de Lusson. "She belongs to us until the end of the month, and we shall not let her off a single day earlier."

"She would not let herself be taken away," answered Guy. "I shall await her good pleasure. I have friends in garrison at Tours and at Orleans, and an estate to visit in Sologne, so all that will fill up my time."

"You might have passed the time at 'Les Rocheilles,'" I said, rather dryly.

"And to think that I have come at thirty-seven an hour to hear that!"

The distressed expression of my god-son seemed to us irresistibly droll. The gaiety it caused put us all at ease.

After tea, Guy asked Miss Jones to let him visit "The Cottage." He came out afterwards visibly touched by what he had seen, but he at once hid this with a jest.

"Have you never been afraid that your daughter would join the Salvation Army?" he asked Monsieur de Lusson.

"You mean that as a joke," answered the latter,

smiling; "but last year I really had to go with her several times to the Rue Auber, and to the lectures of a French Salvationist. She was thoroughly taken up with the work. It required nothing less than the ugliness of the costume for reassuring me. I knew that she would shrink at the bonnet."

Josée coloured, and then her face became grave.

"There was no need for you to be afraid; I am simply incapable of the self-sacrifice that such a life demands," she said.

"Heaven be praised!" exclaimed Monsieur de Lusson, with comic fervour.

"I have been into several of the homes of the men and women officers of the Salvation Army," continued Josée. "They are very poor and very touching. At any minute the husband and wife must be ready to take help here or there. In reality, the Salvationists are true rescuers. Only think that they have found the way to bring back the most fallen creature to a social existence. In their ranks that creature may become some one, and some one very great, even. That Army incarnates the force of good; we ought to help it as much as possible in its struggle against evil."

"You see," said Monsieur de Lusson, in a mocking way, "my daughter goes in for preaching without the bonnet!"

Josée put her arm through her father's.

"You would get what you deserved if I accepted the bonnet!"

Upon this we said good-bye to Miss Jones and went towards the "Commanderie." Guy admired the old house, the park and its century-old cedars very much. My hosts did not fail to invite him to luncheon for the next day. Under pretext of showing him my beautiful rooms, I took him away with me.

"You know I shall not allow you to stay at Tours," I said, as soon as the door was shut. "You must go and wait for me at Saumur; or at Orleans, if you like."

"Why?" he asked, with a false air of innocence.

"Because the Lussons, who are hospitality itself, would think themselves obliged to give you free entrance to their house, and they have a daughter. If people see you coming here half-a-dozen times they will imagine that you have *intentions*."

My god-son's face lighted up with joy and mischief.

"But that is just it; I have intentions," he said.

"Ah!" I exclaimed, thunderstruck.

He put his arm around my shoulders — another of my husband's ways — made me sit down on a little sofa, and then said, with a serious face —

"God-mother, scarcely six months ago you saw me nearly dying through a woman's treachery. What shall you think of me to-day if I tell you that I am in love with Mademoiselle de Lusson. Shall you not think badly of me?"

"I know life too well for that," I replied, sincerely. "Madame de Mauriones was the physical passion of your youth."

Guy rose

"No, god-mother; it was a deeper feeling than that."

The loyalty of the young man towards his first love pleased me infinitely.

"And I am astonished," he continued, "at being able to love again."

He drew a long breath.

"Ah, how good it is, this warmth and this light! When they came back to me I could not believe my senses."

"And when did they come back?" I asked, with a

smile. He returned to the sofa, and said, putting his right arm around me —

"When? After my departure from Aix-les-Bains. As soon as I was alone I suddenly missed the blue-grey eyes of Mademoiselle de Lusson, her Irish eyes, as you call them. I wanted them to see the landscapes which I saw. It seemed to me that my eyes were no longer enough for admiring and looking. Wasn't that curious?"

"Oh, very curious," I said in a mocking tone. "It was no longer the society of god-mother that you needed, was it?"

"You are not jealous, I hope! You know very well how much I love you."

"Oh yes; please continue."

"Without my having any idea of it, her face seemed to have stamped itself on my memory. She appeared to me so full of life and so attractive. At 'Les Rocheilles' I did nothing but live again that last week at Aix-les-Bains. I remembered all her words, her slightest gestures. The wish to see her again became irresistible; I put my machine under pressure, and turned the wheel towards her. Ah, god-mother, you cannot imagine what one feels, rushing through space, at the rate of thirty-seven an hour, to reach the woman one loves. A twentieth-century sensation, that, and divine, I can assure you."

"Ah, now I am well up as to the impressions of an automobilist in love. Jean Noël thanks you, my dear boy," I said, with a smile.

Guy walked up and down the room several times, and then, sitting down once more, he again put his arm around my shoulder and said, in a voice full of emotion —

"Do you think they'll give her to me?"

"I hope so. From the first moment Monsieur and Madame de Lusson liked you. Your name and your fortune cannot fail to satisfy them."

"And what about her? You talk to her a great deal; I am sure that you read her like a book. Tell me —"

"Not a word. That would be treason. Besides, I am sure you know perfectly well what to count on with regard to her sentiments."

My god-son coloured.

"I have only my intuition; I want more than that. To-morrow I shall know."

"If she is destined for you, you may consider yourself fortunate. She is the most wholesome and the most delightful creature I have ever met."

"If she were not destined for me it would be an abominable snare. I have had my share of bad luck, you know, and that rather reassures me."

I rose, and Guy did the same.

"What nice rooms you have!" he exclaimed, looking round him. "Oh, what dear old furniture, what soft colouring! Are you not better off in a house so private and snug than you are at the hotel? You shall not stay any longer 'on the branch,' as you call it; you shall have my bachelor flat. It's no encumbrance, a bachelor's flat. You will be able to have the illusion of liberty there."

"That's enough," I said nervously; "do not let us make plans, it brings bad luck, and you must go now. Luncheon is at eleven, remember; do not come at nine."

"I will try not to."

I stood still, in the middle of the little drawing-room, and shivered from head to foot with a sensation of shadow and solitude. Mechanically I went nearer to

the fire and held out my hands to it. Its flame did not warm me. It was my heart, I think, that was cold.

*Commanderie de Rouziers.*

Well, the sacrifice is made! The Lussons have given Josée away, I have given my god-son away, and we have not yet recovered from our surprise. When the moment of decisive action arrives, either we have been prepared for it unawares, or we are completely dominated by the higher forces; all resistance, all will power, is annihilated; the words, even, which we pronounce seem to be prompted. We are caught up in a sort of whirlwind, and then the whirlwind is lived through, the fact accomplished, consciousness comes back to us, and with it either joy or sorrow. This phenomenon has just happened for us. It has left me with an inward trembling which only my pen can calm. The greatest events appear so small when reduced to the condition of copy.

Yesterday morning my god-son arrived earlier than he ought to have done, in the hope of waylaying Madame de Lusson, but without succeeding in this. Two neighbours had been invited to luncheon. In spite of the presence of the strangers, and the extremely animated conversation, I distinctly felt the magnetic current which existed between the two young people. My feeble organs were incapable of distinguishing its waves, but I saw its effects. The great Invisible had put a warm light into Guy's eyes and made the blue of the pupils deeper; it had tinted with pink my little friend's cheeks and given to her voice joyous notes full of deep feeling. All the time I had the impression that it was acting outwardly. Love, considered thus, as an agent of Nature, seems to be more powerful, more divine than ever.

An excursion was arranged for the afternoon to Pool Farm, a model farm which belongs to a cousin of Mon-

sieur de Lusson. The four men started by automobile. I said to myself that that would delay Guy's affair, and I was glad of it — yes, really glad, though I cannot understand exactly why. Directly after tea I went up to my room to write a few urgent letters. When I had finished I went to the window, and started with surprise on seeing Guy and Josée walking slowly up and down the lawn. I saw them stop, all at once, under a rose-bush and the old cedar, which the Lussons have named " Grandfather." My god-son took his hat off slowly with his left hand, and stood bare-headed before the young girl. In this *tableau vivant* I felt the presence of love just as one feels prayer in Millet's " Angelus." The sight of this youthful happiness caused me neither regret nor envy. I had, at that moment, the impression that I was on a summit, that I was very high up indeed, very far away, and, quite proud of my serenity, I moved away discreetly. Scarcely a quarter of an hour had passed by when I heard a joyous knock at my door. Guy came in like a whirlwind, clasped me in his arms, which were still trembling, and said —

" God-mother, god-mother, she loves me! "

I disengaged myself from his hug.

" That is no reason for suffocating me," I said, trying to get my breath again.

" Oh forgive me, I am so happy."

He threw himself down into an armchair, and I remained standing by the mantel-shelf.

" Then she told you that she loved you? "

" No, I felt it; that was very much better! Just now, when we were strolling in the park, I told her of my intention to go to Saumur. She did not flinch, but if you had seen how her face clouded over! I should never have imagined that a poor little word of mine could have such an effect. ' It is god-mother who is sending me

away,' I added at once. 'She declares that if I stay at Tours I should be at the "Commanderie" all the time, and that that would never do, unless I had the right to come here.'"

"God-mother was very useful to you, I see!"

"Very useful," replied my boy, with a wink. "Mademoiselle de Lusson understood, and her face lighted up again. I told her that I had the greatest wish to secure that right, but that before asking for it I wanted to have her permission. Then she stopped, turned towards me an instant, and said, with a pretty, grave look, 'Should you be very unhappy if I refused you this permission?' You can guess my reply. 'Well, I don't want you to be unhappy; Madame de Myères would never forgive me!' she said. Those were her exact words."

"The little hypocrite!" I exclaimed, amused.

"At those words, I was tempted to do like the lovers in English novels, take her in my arms and give her a kiss, but my Latin education held me back, and I simply took off my hat."

"Your declaration scene was very cleverly arranged. Jean Noël presents his compliments to you."

"Well, I can scarcely believe myself to have been the author of it. Fancy, I never said anything that I had prepared. The conversation began in quite a different manner. I heard my own words. I do not know whether it is the influence of your ideas, but for the first time I had the distinct impression that I was being directed by a higher force. That does not much matter to me, as the higher force led me where I wanted to go. And now," he added, rising, "let us go to Monsieur and Madame de Lusson."

"What, without any warning, you want to go and ask them for their daughter right away? Youth is pitiless! You will please allow me to prepare them for it.

I will speak to them this very evening, and, in case they allow you to make your offer, I will send you a telegram in the morning, and then you can come full speed if you like."

"Yes," he said, after a moment's hesitation, "you are right; that would be more the thing. Do you know, god-mother, that marriage is a very great thing, and not at all trivial, as people imagine. When I think that this girl, whom I scarcely dare to look at, will perhaps be given to me, will become my wife — my wife, you understand — it makes me dizzy. And it is to you that I shall owe her," he added, lifting my two hands to his lips.

"Many people and many things will have worked for this union if it should take place," I answered. "Do you know from whom the first idea of it came to me?"

"No."

"From Madame de Mauriones."

Guy let go my hands and looked at me in a questioning way. I told him the incident of the Skating Rink.

"You seemed so far away from marriage, and Josée seemed so near it, that I had never thought of the possibility of your lives being united. That glance from the Marquise was an indication, a suggestion. I saw the presentiment of a jealous woman in it, and it encouraged me."

"Madame de Mauriones will again have served to make me know the value of true love," added my god-son in a grave voice. "You know that she is going to be married?"

"To Prince K—?" I asked, thoughtlessly.

A deep red rose to Guy's face.

"Ah, you know all about it, I see," he said, laughing nervously. "Yes, to Prince K—. He has gold mines

in Siberia, bushels of precious stones, all that is necessary for the happiness of certain women."

"Let us pity them, my dear boy, for not knowing other things."

"Let us pity them," he repeated; "I am quite willing." He then took my hands again in his, and added, "Then it is understood; a telegram to-morrow, and early, too?"

"As early as possible, and I hope it will fill your soul with joy."

"You are an angel, god-mother!"

Upon this he took his hat and went towards the door. From the threshold he threw me a kiss, and, like his father in moments of exultation, he called out —

"I adore you!"

As soon as I was alone again, a crowd of doubts and fears began to assail me. After all, my hosts might have other views for their daughter. I knew that they would never oppose her inclination; but would not her inclination for Guy cause them some regret? Count de Morziers was certainly a much wealthier match. Supposing that, instead of satisfaction, I was about to bring them great disappointment.

I remembered, curiously enough, Monsieur de Lusson's first glance at my god-son though, the evening I had introduced him at the People's University. It was the glance of an observer, and it was followed by an expression of pleasure. During the last week of our stay at Aix-les-Bains I had felt a secret understanding between us, a kind of complicity. That intuition, which was so distinct, reassured me. Jean Noël prepared a fine exordium, but he was not to utter even the first word of it, of course. In the depths of my heart I was ridiculously proud of playing this mother's *rôle*, and delighted to experience fresh emotions.

Between six and seven o'clock my hosts generally meet in the library, where the letters are brought to them. That time seemed to me favourable. As I went downstairs my step became slower and slower, and my heart beat more and more. When I entered, Monsieur de Lusson was reading the *Figaro* aloud, his wife was crocheting a little garment, a wood fire was blazing in the large fire-place, the lamp shades formed a pretty zone of light, a black cat with folded paws was asleep on the leaves of a manuscript. I thought of the effect of my words falling in this atmosphere of peace, and my confusion increased. I was welcomed, as always, with the most sincere kindliness. I sat down in my arm-chair to the right of the bureau, and, taking up one of the large tortoise-shell paper-knives, which are so pleasant for nervous hands to touch, I asked —

"And what about the visit to Pool Farm, how did it go off?"

The question, asked solely to delay my opening fire, was destined to hasten this.

"Very well," answered Monsieur de Lusson, "my cousin was delighted to exhibit his mission, for it is a mission, to a Grignon pupil. Do you know that I owe an apology to Monsieur d'Hauterive."

"Why?"

"I thought he was a simple amateur of agronomy; this afternoon he astonished us all by his real knowledge. One feels in him the need of creating, of transforming. One feels that he loves the soil, because it is a field for experiments. Oh, he will do something, that young man."

"What a pleasure to hear you speak like that! You have a weakness for him, I believe," I added, rather wickedly.

"That's true."

"Well, then, tell me," I said, clenching my paper-knife in my hand, "if you had a daughter, would you give her to him?"

How the odd idea of asking the question in this way came to me I do not know. My hosts looked at each other, deeply moved. Monsieur de Lusson's eyeglass seemed to shine more brightly.

"What do you think, Louise?" he asked, with comic gravity. "If we had a daughter, would we give her to Monsieur d'Hauterive?"

The mother, troubled and excited, gave a faint smile.

"I think we would," she said.

"And as for me, I'm sure of it," added the father warmly.

"But is this serious?" asked Madame de Lusson, rather bewildered.

"Serious! Yesterday my god-son had the courage to confess to me that if he had come a fortnight too early to Touraine, it was not for my sake, but for that of Mademoiselle Josée, and to-day he sends me as ambassadress to know whether he can come to-morrow to ask your consent, neither more nor less than that," I said, throwing down again the paper-knife, which was of no further use.

We all three of us rose instinctively, as though for some solemn deed. Madame de Lusson kissed me with one of those warm impulses which remind me of Colette. I held out my hand to my host. He pressed it, and then raised it to his lips.

"Let Monsieur d'Hauterive come," he said, simply.

"Thank you for him and for me," I replied, moved to the very depth of my heart. "It is much more easy to write novels than to live them," I added, letting myself fall back in my arm-chair.

"Poor Madame de Myères!" said my host, with a smile.

"I am glad, though, to have been destined to work for the happiness of these two children. Josée is a treasure of womanly qualities and of modern qualities."

"You hear that, Louise," said Monsieur de Lusson, as he jokingly shook his own hand.

"As to Guy, he is perfectly healthy in mind, body and soul."

"I do not doubt it, and I felt that at our first meeting. The idea that he would be a desirable husband for Josée crossed my brain several times, I confess to you. One is not master in these things. I studied him closely. I talked to him like a comrade, so that he should let himself go. I soon recognised that he had what the English call a clean mind, that he had the nature of a gentleman, morally and physically. You understand me. It seems to me that for a refined woman nothing is above that."

"Nothing!"

Madame de Lusson and I uttered this word together.

"There are some men, intimacy with whom must be odious. I have had tears in my eyes on looking at certain brides, and have said to myself, 'There goes one who, to-morrow, will no longer be a girl, but a martyr.' I was resolved, cost what it might, to keep my daughter from such a fate. Poor child, she is so ignorant of life. As regards all this, Monsieur d'Hauterive reassures me completely. Do you know, this afternoon my cousin, Seauve, said to me, nodding towards him, 'There's a young man whom I should approve for Josée!'"

"That proves that they certainly look as though they were made for each other," I said, with a smile.

I told my hosts of the fear I had on seeing Count de Morziers so attentive to their daughter. Monsieur de Lusson began to laugh.

"For the last year his family has been trying to work my wife, and she did not want to discourage him. Mothers must always have a son-in-law in reserve. Then, too, we guessed that Josée's heart was rather inclined towards your god-son. That did not fail to make us rather anxious, for, you see, he might have had some tie."

I felt that there was a sort of question in these words.

"There was one, as it happens: Providence broke it in time, and in so violent a manner that he nearly died of it; but the rupture is irrevocable, I assure you. No other *liaison* would have prepared him so well for marriage. The woman who initiated him was all that we could desire. If I had not known him to be absolutely free I should have taken care not to introduce him to you."

At this moment we heard a noise in the hall.

"Here is the young person, it will be amusing," said Monsieur de Lusson, his eyes lighting up with mischief.

The door opened, and two terriers rushed in first, giving us wild caresses. One of them sprang on to the table, licked the black cat vigorously, and she, roused suddenly out of her sleep or dream, gave him two scratches on the nose, a regular nervous creature's welcome. Josée followed.

"Good-evening, all of you!" she said, throwing her hat on a chair. She examined us all with a curious look; then, as though she had a presentiment of the solemnity of the hour, instead of going to perch herself near her father, according to her custom, she sat down on the arm of her mother's chair.

"Anything fresh in the *Figaro?*" she asked, in a careless way.

"No, not in the *Figaro*," replied M. de Lusson, standing up in front of the chimney-piece and looking down

on the scene; "but Madame de Myères has just made us a very interesting communication."

"Ah!"

There was a certain emotion in this little word.

"Yes, she has just been proposing a very good match for you; a marquis, a very handsome man, thirty-five years of age, a *château* in Anjou, twelve thousand pounds income and prospects. That's enticing, isn't it?"

This was uttered in so perfectly natural a way that, in spite of the words exchanged with Guy, Josée was taken in. Her face clouded over in a way peculiar to her, she looked at me with astonished eyes full of reproach, and then said, in a disdainful tone —

"Enticing? Not for me. I have no wish to become a marquise. As for a *château*, I have Chavigny, and I should not care for my husband to have a fortune so much greater than mine," she added, swinging her foot in a way which betrayed her annoyance.

Monsieur de Lusson was jubilant.

"But, you wretched child," he said, "you will be left on our hands."

"You wouldn't be much to be pitied if I were."

"No, but it would be humiliating."

I thought the joke had lasted long enough, and I said, with a smile, to Josée —

"Come here, little girl."

She obeyed me, and in a very stiff way came and perched herself on the arm of my chair. I pressed her hand affectionately. "Console yourself; this suitor, whose ambassadress I am, is not a marquis, but a simple baron — my god-son, in short. He loves you, and he can see no happiness except in you and through you. You will accept him, won't you, if only to be my god-daughter?"

At the first words a wave of rich blood coloured Josée's face, the corners of her lips quivered slightly, nervous tears came to her eyes.

"I should like to punish you all by refusing him," she said, "but I can't."

"Ah, that's it, is it?" said Monsieur de Lusson, laughing; "then it's yes?"

Josée got up, and after whispering in our ears, to one after another, a joyous "Yes," she rushed away.

"Well, then, we have our reply," said Monsieur de Lusson. "Oh, there is no doubt of it."

"Guy must be in a fine fever! I promised him a telegram to-morrow morning."

"Write it at once," suggested the kind, indulgent mother. "We will send it to Rouziers first thing in the morning."

And I wrote —

"Affectionate congratulations; expecting you.

"GODMOTHER."

"Is that right?" I asked, reading it to them.

"Perfectly," replied Madame de Lusson.

I rose, my host came to me, and, taking my two hands in his, said —

"I need not tell you of our gratitude; you feel it, I hope. This marriage delights me still more, because it will make our friendship closer. Poor Madame de Myères! You wanted to live independently, and here you are with a whole family on your hands. We shall have to finish together, and you must work at my conversion. We will play bézique, bridge, with a dummy, and we shall have some baptisms. You can write a novel to teach the art of growing old pleasantly. We will

utilise our lives to the very end, and we will be very happy, in spite of age and of rheumatism."

"So be it," I replied gaily.

A wall, behind which something is going on, becomes interesting. I do not know who said that, but the human creature, whose soul has been, or is, the theatre of an extraordinary event, produces the same effect. The play of the forces of destiny communicates to him a peculiar magnetism, makes him almost sacred. During the whole of dinner my little friend made me experience this strange sensation. My eyes kept fixing themselves eagerly on her face. To catch what? Had she, then, an invisible halo? The funniest part was that her parents watched her with the same curiosity. Her dress of ivory-coloured canvas, with wide, transparent sleeves, her bodice trimmed with a bunch of roses, made her look delightfully young. At times her inward excitement overflowed in rapid words, changing her very voice. I could not help admiring her tact and her self-possession. She took part in the conversation as usual, and appeared to be interested in it. She then played bridge with meritorious attention. I guessed the mysterious force which, from Tours, was acting on her without her knowledge. She yielded to it for a second, then by an effort of will she brought her thoughts back to the cards, drew her beautiful straight eyebrows together, in order to reflect better as to whether she ought to "double" or declare "no trumps." I took pity on her and said I was tired, in order to give her back to herself and Guy. I advised her in a whisper, kissing her at the same time, to put on the next morning the tailor-costume she had worn on Sunday. She replied with a glance of understanding. I am sure she had already

chosen that one. After such a day I could not sleep before morning, so that it was late when I got up. I had only just finished dressing when my god-son arrived. He clasped me in his arms, no longer with the juvenile transport of the evening before, but with the gravity of a man.

"Then it's 'Yes'?" he said, deeply moved.

"It is 'Yes.' You certainly do not deserve it, considering your very recent horror of marriage and of girls."

"You are right. What an idiot I was!"

"Providence has spoiled you by reserving for you a wife like Mademoiselle de Lusson."

"Spoiled me: I should just think so, god-mother; and I am quite conscious of it, you may be sure."

He made me sit down on the little sofa.

"And now tell me all," he said.

I then described, without omitting anything, the scene of the evening before. He rose and began to pace the room, while twisting his moustache. I noticed how well he looked, and also the perfect correctness of his morning dress. I even rejoiced for an instant in the thought of the harmonious *ensemble* that his well-cut suit would make with the tailor-costume of my little friend. He suddenly stopped short in front of me, with a comically scared look.

"God-mother, what am I going to say to Monsieur and Madame de Lusson? How does one ask for a girl's hand? Is there any formula?"

"I know nothing about it," I answered, smiling; "your affection is too sincere not to inspire you with words for the situation."

I rose. Guy took my hand and held it against his breast.

"Feel how it beats inside there."

"It is fine, that strong, regular rhythm," I said, with admiration.

My boy smiled.

"God-mother, you are astounding with your way of considering Life."

"Don't be scandalised; it is Jean Noël who looks at it like this." Then, taking his arm, I said, "Come, let us go down."

My hosts were waiting for us in the library.

"Here is the celebrated god-son," I announced, by way of making the situation easy at once; "he has come to ask for all that you have which is most dear and precious to you."

Monsieur de Lusson held out both his hands to the suitor.

"Our little Josée, isn't it?" he said, in an affectionate way. "Well, my dear fellow, we are happy to give her to you. We feel that you love her as she deserves to be loved. Your character is a guarantee of happiness for her, and her happiness is what we desire above everything."

A wave of deep emotion coloured Guy's face. Instinctively he turned towards the mother. "How am I to thank you?" he stammered out; "I can find no words ——"

"We do not need words," answered Madame de Lusson. "We know your feelings, and that suffices for us. I warn you, that I do not want a son-in-law, but a son," she added, with Colette's bright smile; "I have always wanted one."

"I shall have no difficulty in becoming yours, you are so much like my mother," replied the young man, raising to his lips the hand that the charming woman held out to him.

"I will tell you, some time, why I would have chosen you out of a hundred," began my host, again tapping Guy's shoulder affectionately. "Go now to your *fiancée;* she will be either in the park or at 'The Cottage,' letting herself be looked for. And, above all, don't forget luncheon!"

When we were alone again we looked at each other. A silence fell upon us, that peculiar silence which follows the great events of Life. I was the first to break it. And we then talked freely, and had the consolation of feeling that we were all very united and very great friends. Towards eleven o'clock we saw the young couple coming out on the lawn.

"What a handsome couple they are!" said Monsieur de Lusson. "It makes one wish to be a grandfather!"

The lovers came slowly towards us. My coquettish little friend had added to her tailor-costume a waistcoat of white cloth and a white necktie. This was extremely becoming. At the threshold of the French window Guy took Josée's arm and drew it through his.

"Let me introduce my *fiancée.*"

"Let me introduce my *fiancé,*" said the young girl, smiling.

Deep emotion penetrated through this speech, made in a joking way.

"Do you take me for the blacksmith of Gretna Green?" asked my host, in order to hide his feelings.

"I should think myself better married by you than by him," answered my god-son gaily; "you have more authority."

"That is possible, but I will leave the honour and the pleasure of the ceremony to the mayor and the priest."

Josée came and kissed her mother and me affectionately. She then went to her father. Monsieur de Lus-

son gazed at her a moment, then taking her two hands he raised them to his lips with a shade of respect.

"We make these children's hands," he said, "to give them away some day. This is Life. I am paying my debt to-day, you will pay yours when your turn comes, little girl. In the mean time, I am glad to think that there is some one to take my place with you."

"No one will ever take your place, father," replied the girl quickly.

"Oh no, no! Monsieur d'Hauterive is not taking any one's place."

"Because he has his own, I suppose?"

Josée nodded, blushing.

"Ah, Madame de Myères, what gratitude we owe you! If you had not had a god-son, this young person would have been capable of remaining an old maid."

Luncheon was announced at this moment; Monsieur de Lusson gave Guy the hand he had been holding.

"Take your *fiancée* in to luncheon, and go first. It will give François a shock, and he will have the pleasure of announcing the news to the other servants."

During the remainder of the day the atmosphere of the "Commanderie," always agreeable, was truly exquisite. Happy love, our own satisfaction, the kindness of my hosts, the over-excited affection of the servants, spread about waves of joy. I felt them distinctly. The dogs, the cats — especially the latter — seemed to be affected by this beneficial electricity. They went for mad scampers round the lawn; I had never seen them so gay. There is no doubt about it, certain sentiments give out warm waves. When man knows more about himself, he will pay attention to creating these for his own comfort.

Guy sent Louis to Tours to fetch his dress suit and the bouquet, every flower of which he had chosen in

the morning. In spite of the novelty of the situation, the dinner was very gay, without any trace of embarrassment. Miss Jones was radiant. There was joy even in her freckles. On leaving the table she pressed my hand and said in a low voice —

"Monsieur d'Hauterive will make a good god-father." She evidently felt reassured about the fate of her boys.

Guy had the tact to leave early. He is going to Paris to-morrow to buy the engagement ring. I knew that Josée would want to have a talk with me. Many a time her eyes had sought mine. We had even exchanged signs of mutual intelligence. Jean Noël was not sorry to have her confidences as a girl in love. Towards half-past ten, a little timid knock, very different from that of the other nights, was to be heard at my door. I compared it inwardly with the triumphant knock which, the evening before, had announced my god-son. My visitor arrived, as usual, in her white dressing-gown. From the end of the room where I was, I saw a veritable glow on the upper part of her face. I went forward to meet her. She put her arms silently round my neck, her cheek against mine.

"Well, little girl, are you happy?" I asked, freeing myself gently.

"Happy!" she repeated; "happy! I hope that you, too, have known what I feel to-day?"

"Be content," I said; "I have had my share of happiness, a very large share."

"Ah, so much the better! I should be wretched to think that this joy should have been refused to you. And then, too, you can understand me entirely."

"Oh, yes, I can understand you."

Josée sat down in a low chair by the fire-place, and I in the arm-chair opposite her.

"You see, Madame de Myères," she began, "there

are things that one cannot talk about with one's mother. I wonder why this is. And married women are not nice to girls. Instead of initiating them in a sisterly way about life, letting them profit by their experience, they say, 'You must do as we did, look out for yourselves.' They put on mysterious airs, which make us imagine all kinds of horrors. Some of them have given me regular nightmares. We are therefore reduced to talking of love and marriage among ourselves; we talk about these things in an absurd way, probably, like blind people talk of light."

"That is just it."

My little friend crossed her hands round her knees, and looked at me for a moment, her lips quivering.

"Jean Noël," she said at last.

"Well?" I answered, with an encouraging smile.

"Can a person love any one she has never seen?"

"I think so; one may be affected in advance by the radiation of another person."

"Well, then, I was."

"Really?"

"The first time that you said 'my god-son' it made an impression on me. Afterwards I always listened with interest to anything you told about him. I liked that name of Guy d'Hauterive better than any other."

"I felt that."

Mademoiselle de Lusson opened her eyes wide and looked at me.

"No!" she said, with an expression of stupor. "How dangerous a novelist is!"

"Very dangerous."

"You didn't think, I hope, that I was on the look-out for a husband. All kinds of men had already been introduced to me."

"That idea never occurred to me. But go on, little girl; Jean Noël is greatly interested."

"You are making fun?"

"Not at all."

A wave of colour passed over the girl's face.

"When 'your boy' was taken ill, I was most anxious and distressed. It was I who telephoned to have news of him, and my heart used to beat as though he were on the other side. Tell me, don't you think it was strange?"

"It seems so to us, because we know nothing about the exteriorisation of man. In the near future, science will study the texture of Life, the most beautiful secrets of Nature are there."

"Ah, let science study them quickly, then, these secrets; it is too stupid not to know a single one of the forces which make us act!"

"And when you saw 'the god-son,' were you not disappointed?"

"No, on the contrary; but I imagined that he was darker and not so tall. I was wildly glad to hear that he was coming to Aix. You see, I am telling you all."

"You are a charming penitent to confess."

"But for a few days I had a great deal of disappointment to bear. I felt that I did not exist for him; it was all in vain that I changed my dress or my hat, he looked at me and did not see me. There was an obstacle on his side, I did not know what, which gave me the impression of a high wall. When you used to talk together, and when you were having tea with him on the Club terrace, I envied you terribly. You didn't look as though you had any idea of your good fortune," added Josée seriously.

"No, really; and tell me," I continued, pitiless, like an inquisitive confessor, "had not the high wall of which you speak disappeared the last week of our stay at Aix?"

The young girl coloured; a bright smile lighted up her face.

"Yes, there were only the tennis-nets left."

"We will put a commemorative tablet up to that blessed tennis-court of the Hôtel Splendide."

"Blessed, truly," murmured Josée.

"Then when Guy landed here on Sunday, you knew it was for you that he came?"

Mademoiselle nodded her head, and then said, with pretty confusion —

"As well as though he had told me."

"Ah, the communication was well established, I see," I said in a mocking tone.

My little friend clasped her hands more firmly round her knees, her eyes were fixed on the flame from the fire, but I saw that she was looking within her soul.

"How wonderful it is, this transmission of thought without words," she said slowly; "these intuitions, this power that another person acquires over you! I go from one surprise to another. I have become a veritable phenomenon for myself. Does it seem ridiculous to you, this autopsychology?" asked the girl, looking at me rather anxiously.

"Ridiculous!" I exclaimed. "Ah, you do not know what joy you give me. In my time we loved instinctively, without knowing why or how; you of the twentieth century are beginning to analyse your sensations, to want to sound the mystery. That proves an immense progress."

"My studies, insufficient though they are, our con-

versations, all these recent discoveries, make me reflect in spite of myself."

"You are influenced, too, without your knowledge, by the ideas which are in the air, the new currents. Science is going ahead. Who knows if, after the Röntgen, the Becquerel and the N. rays, it will not discover the A. ray, the ray of Love?"

A little fright was depicted on Mademoiselle de Lusson's face.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, as though suffocated. "That would be rather terrible. Don't you remember the fable of Psyche? She wanted to see Love, and it flew away."

"Yes, it was afraid of the light, because it was still a child; but, remember, it came back again later, at the age of a man, perhaps, and it gave her immortality."

"That is true; oh yes, that is true!" said Josée, with a radiant expression. "I had forgotten the end of the fable."

"Your epoch will probably see that ending. Do not fear anything, little girl; God's work within us and outside us is greater than we imagine. We are greater, too; Science will teach us to understand Life better, and it will teach us to love Him from whom life emanates."

"What happiness! Madame de Myères, do you think that Monsieur d'Hauterive would have felt much grief — really much, I mean — if I had not cared for him?" she suddenly asked.

"Very much, my child, for all his hopes of happiness are in you."

Mademoiselle de Lusson clasped her hands.

"Oh, I hope that I shall not disappoint them!"

"I am sure of that."

Josée got up.

"You weren't very well satisfied yesterday," I added, smiling, "when your father told you that I was proposing a marquis as a candidate for your hand, instead of proposing my god-son?"

"It was abominable of papa. He has begged my forgiveness."

The young girl put her arms round my neck, and through the thin dressing-gown I felt her body trembling with joyous vitality.

"You are an angel!" she murmured.

"Guy has already told me that, find something else," I said.

She moved a little farther away, looked at me with a smile at the corners of her lips, and then said in a low voice full of emotion —

"God-mother."

"That's right! That's what I wanted to hear! You have confessed very well, my dear god-child. Jean Noël gives you absolution. Now go and sleep, and may God bless you 'with His great blessing,' as the peasants say with us."

With this wish I sent my little friend away, and, as I watched her go, I felt that complacency which one has in spite of one's self after making somebody happy.

*Commanderie de Rouziers.*

The engagement of Mademoiselle de Lusson and the Baron d'Hauterive has been announced to friends and acquaintances. The bouquet with which Louis insists on decorating his automobile every time that the young girl gets in it, can no longer astonish any one. My little friend now wears on her finger a master-piece of our Art Nouveau; two ruby cabochons set in a ring of dull gold of curious design. Monsieur de Lusson has overwhelmed us with joy by giving to Guy the Chavigny

estate. He has done this, I do not doubt, at Josée's request. Uncle Georges, whom I had kept informed of everything, is delighted. Our engaged couple are both full of tact and discretion; they do not attempt to avoid each other, but walk about and talk before our eyes. They enjoy themselves with us, and join gleefully in our game at hearts, an American game for five persons which has necessarily taken the place of bridge. I fancy that my god-son is not sorry to put us all between himself and the living temptation that this young girl must be to him. Madame de Lusson is openly glad to marry her daughter and to marry her well. She is already thinking of the trousseau, the dresses and the ceremony. With my host the reaction is less joyful. He feels, in advance, the void that is about to be made in his home. And then to give his daughter, the baby of former days, the child of yesterday, the maiden of to-day, away to a man! It is secretly repugnant to him; I have guessed that. It is all in vain that he keeps saying to himself, "It is the law of Nature." That law wounds, in him, an infinitely delicate sentiment that many fathers know. As for me, I feel the secret satisfaction which the accomplishment of a difficult task gives, a curious relief, a sensation of security. It is as though I have just escaped a great danger. I watch Guy's happiness, I enjoy it and rejoice in it, with all those maternal fibres which have so strangely vibrated in me under my heart. At times, though, I cannot help regretting that I am no longer necessary to him. Then, too, that likeness to his father, which love now accentuates, gives me occasionally strange hallucinations. When I see him from a little way off, with a light falling on him in a certain way, walking by the side of Josée, resting his arm familiarly on hers, I feel a brusque sensation of desertion and

infidelity. It is only fleeting, but it is painful, like the blade of a knife on the heart. This sensation is such a reflex one that I have not time to repress it. How mysterious this poor human atom is!

This afternoon, the beautiful mild weather allowed us to have tea out-of-doors. Madame de Lusson and her daughter were dressed for an automobile drive to Tours. Three unexpected guests had sent word by telegram that they were coming to dinner. It was necessary to go to Ladmiraut's to fetch more provisions. Monsieur de Lusson looked round the table a moment, and a smile lighted up his eye-glasses.

"Do you know, Mlle. Josée," he said, "that if we had not all gone to Cannes you would not have that pretty ring on your finger? I am going in for inductive philosophy like Madame de Myères."

"Make fun of me if you like, but for us to be here together to-day," I added, "it was necessary for me to have met Sir William. He insisted in the most extraordinary way, considering his usual discretion, on my making your acquaintance."

"You refused, I would wager?"

"I did. It seemed to me that it was too late to make new friends. Then when I had seen Madame de Lusson and this young person ——"

"And me," added my host.

"And you, of course, all my objections vanished. The result — well, there it is," I said, pointing to the engaged couple.

"Oh, Guy," exclaimed Josée, "I am so sorry that you never knew Sir William, I should so much like to talk about him to you."

"Talk about him by all means. It's enough that he contributed towards bringing me here for him to interest me. And to think that you were all working for

my happiness, without my having any idea of it, whilst I —"

My god-son broke off in time, and a fleeting colour passed over his face.

"When one stops to look at Life one is quite amazed," he continued. "There, now I am going to eat this piece of bread-and-butter with more gratitude," he said, slowly doubling up a thin slice.

"Oh no!" exclaimed Madame de Lusson, "make haste, on the contrary. Cook is waiting. My lord and master does not like dinners that go wrong. You shall philosophise another time."

The young people hurried with their tea. The automobile came for them, and Monsieur de Lusson and I were soon alone. I went on drinking my tea, and he lighted his cigarette.

"How sorry I am," I said, "to think that Sir William will not see the marriage of these children. I consider that he was the principal agent in it, the factor."

"A most extraordinary thing was the discovery of the relationship of my wife and Lady Randolph. One would have to be rather dull not to recognise in this fact a sort of destiny."

"A confession," I said; "I take note of that."

"Oh, you will never make me believe that I am a mere factor."

"A co-operator with God! Does not the situation seem high enough for you?" I asked, smiling.

"It is not that, but there is, in the idea of conscious struggle, of voluntary effort, of responsibility, a dignity which I would not give up. Humanity has believed for so long that it possesses the power of determining for itself."

"It believed for a very long time, also, that the sun

turned round its planet, that the stars had been created to brighten its nights, that it was the centre of the universe. Its vision was set right, and it has not been any unhappier on that account. Besides, this belief in freedom of action, in personal work, was necessary to humanity in its childish state."

"Do you think that humanity is old enough now to do without it?"

"Frankly, no, I do not."

"Come, that is honest at least."

"The majority of men are still incapable of discerning the hand of God in the combinations of life, of feeling the soul of the forces which direct us. They might attribute them to blind fatality, to luck. Generally people who do not believe in anything, the weak ones especially, believe in themselves. That is something. As for me, and those who share my conviction, we belong to the to-morrow, that is all."

"Or to the day after, it seems to me," said my host, with his delicate irony. "I forgive you, Madame de Myères," he continued, "because you never try to build your own ideas into dogmas."

"I know too well that all minds, like all bodies, cannot be fed and sustained in the same way."

"Then, according to your theories, we should have no merit?" began my companion again, with the idea of cornering me.

"No merit? Why, we have immense merit!"

"What is it, if you please?"

"The merit of having lived and suffered. It is all the greater as we never asked to be born, as we did not choose our *rôles*, and as we must work at something which we could not even imagine. I have the consciousness of being the instrument of Providence to such a degree that after a well-filled day, before a

certain number of pages covered with the little characters which are destined to make people think, I have sometimes said aloud, quite spontaneously, 'I hope you are satisfied with your workwoman, oh God!' A sensation of warm joy has gone through me. That was His reply, perhaps. Oh, He recognises the merit of His co-operators! He will recompense our willingness above everything, I fancy, because it facilitates the play of the forces which are leading us towards life, towards beauty."

"A fine hypothesis! Did you convert Sir William to it?"

"Not precisely."

Monsieur de Lusson gave a sigh which came straight from the soul.

"Well, I often envied our friend his absolute faith. The Saxons have a higher idea of God than the Latins. We have too many superstitions between ourselves and Him."

"What is most remarkable is that other great nations, England, Germany and Russia, put themselves openly under the protection of God and invoke Him in their national hymns. Our Republic affects to ignore His existence. It is absolutely ridiculous and grotesque. The Republic has no idea how small and how vulgar it becomes through this."

"The truth is that the Saxon has the religious sentiment, whilst the Latin has just simply a religion. In France we are beginning to leave Catholicism on the road. You must agree that it is too childish."

"Childish, Catholicism!"

"Yes, certainly, Madame de Myères."

"Why, no, it is a religion with grand rites, and together with Buddhism, it is the deepest there is. Just think of it — it has thrown a bridge over to the Beyond;

it has put into activity the psychical forces of which we were ignorant, and by means of these it has done good to humanity and produced masterpieces of art. It calls every day, through the voice of its priests, the divine ray into the host, which is the symbol of corporal life."

"Does it really come there, that ray? That is what we want to know."

"It does come there; I have seen it transfigure unhappy beings, communicate to them extraordinary courage. There is a presence in Catholic churches, it is impossible to deny that. One feels it. I had the curiosity to open my catechism again. You cannot imagine the effect, after thirty-four or thirty-five years. That dogma, which had disgusted my childish and youthful ignorance, appeared to me, in its great lines, of perfectly philosophical simplicity. The theological mysteries seemed to me to enter into the order of the mysteries of Nature. I am quite convinced that Catholicism has had all the revelation that humanity could bear. Science will be its apologist: it will teach us how one walks 'on the waters.'"

"Science, but the Church is afraid of it!"

"Because it is ignorant. Have you read Father Didon's letters?"

"Rather! How the mind of that poor monk soared! What an intuition of the modern movement!"

"Yes, he would have liked Catholicism to have entered into it, to have been at the head of it. He knew that it would bring good capital to it."

"What upset me was to see that he made such a strange mistake in the person he chose as a confidant of his enthusiasm and aspirations. We all knew her at Tours."

"I could quite understand that, though. She was ill at the time, she was going through one of those

physiological or psychological crises which spiritualise woman and bring her near to the priest. She appeared to Father Didon as a soul. It was that soul which he loved. When the crisis had passed, Mademoiselle Z— became, once more, what she was in reality, a practical and very circumspect person. The proof is, that she knew how to take advantage of the halo acquired so cheaply. I feel persuaded that in the depths of her soul she is now astonished at ever having been the woman whom the Dominican called his 'unique daughter.' What an expression that was!"

Monsieur de Lusson pushed his hat back, and said, with eyes full of mockery —

"How in the world did you guess such a thing? You seem to know Life and femininity in all its hidden corners."

"It was for this reason that those magnificent letters did not scandalise me. With their deep philosophy, mingled with a current of pure and manly affection, they caused me infinite pleasure."

"You see, when there is a Father Didon, the Church sends him to Corbara."

"The Father Didons will become so numerous that it will no longer be possible to shut them up. Let Providence go its own way. It will utilise all the precious elements to be found in Catholicism. A lot of shells had become incrusted on the sides of the Ship of the Church. She will get rid of them. The men who are now hammering at her are, perhaps, doing this work. How do we know?"

"Yes, but the truth, where is that?" asked my companion, with some exasperation.

"Scattered about like seeds, I imagine, enclosed in coverings that we must break open, in dogmas, legends, even in fables. For instance, in that poor Book of

Genesis, that has been so much criticised, I discovered a truly extraordinary proof of intuition."

"What was it?"

"The sacred poet gives to the tempter the figure of a serpent. Now the human germ has, in reality, as you know, a serpent's head. It certainly was not through the revelations of a microscope that he had this symbol. And what a symbol!"

Monsieur de Lusson threw away his cigarette and looked at me.

"Ah, that is too strong!" he exclaimed, laughing; "how did the idea of that comparison come to you?"

"At Simley Hall, one Sunday morning, I was alone in the library. After reading once more the Book of Genesis, which always had a sort of fascination for me, I took hap-hazard from the bookshelf, within reach of my hand, a thick volume. It was a book on Anatomy. I opened it just at the place where the illustration reproduced the animalcule in question. The instantaneous comparison took place in my brain and made me utter an exclamation of astonishment. Sir William, who was just coming in, heard it, and I had to tell him the cause. I shall never forget the expression of his face. Surprise made him open his eyes wide, and then, with his strong sense of humour, his poor thin nostrils quivered with laughter. 'Eve discovering the secrets of the earthly Paradise,' he said. His face then quickly recovered its gravity; he passed his hands several times over the Bible as though caressing it, and, in a broken voice, said to me, 'You see there is more light in it than we imagine.' I quite believe, as he did, that there is. We know so few things about this world and about ourselves! Man was created last; he will be studied last, I suppose. We know scarcely anything except about his body, and that

only in an imperfect way. We know nothing about his powers of radiation, his invisible forces, his soul. He has always confessed himself badly hitherto."

"You think so?" said Monsieur de Lusson in a mocking tone.

"Yes, a saint or the very purest man would not, I am sure, dare to reveal himself entirely. I flatter myself on having lived as a lady. Well, there are many thoughts, instincts, impulses that I could not talk about, and I know that these would furnish valuable help to the study of biology."

"Write them."

"Impossible."

"How inquisitive you make me!"

"Question yourself for a moment, and tell me if it is not the same with you."

Monsieur de Lusson fixed his eyes on the table, and his gaze was turned inwards for a moment. He then looked at me with a discomfited, ashamed expression that was very droll.

"Why, yes, I agree with you."

"It is science alone which, by teaching man what he really is, can give him the courage to confess himself."

"Science! You expect too much from it, Madame de Myères. It has not yet brought us one single proof of our immortality. That begins to make me anxious. You believe in that, don't you?"

"With all my soul."

"By virtue of what? You are not a woman to content yourself with promises. Do you even know what we are doing in this world?"

"We are just simply making Life."

My host took off his eye-glass, a sign of great perturbation with him, and gazed at me with a scared look.

"We are making Life, do you say?"

"Yes, visible and invisible Life. Do you think that he who possesses such a power could perish!"

"Logically no."

"Well, then, this is my reason for believing. According to my idea, those who have made sorrowful or inferior Life will finally arrive at making triumphant and superior Life. We are all in the hand of justice and of divine justice."

"But it is like a key, that conception."

"A key which helps marvellously in reading the secret writing that we are; try it. It has permitted me to understand an infinite number of things. By another path I have arrived at a faith which is quite as absolute as Sir Williams's. Jesus said, 'In my Father's house are many mansions.' There are also, no doubt, several roads to them."

I rose, and M. de Lusson followed my example. I held out my hand to him; he raised it to his lips and slowly, as though penetrated by a new idea, he repeated, "We are making Life."

*Commanderie de Rouziers.*

I have just come back from Chavigny. I have knelt down on my husband's tomb; I have taken his son back to the home-nest, and a divine peace has entered into me, that peace which manifests itself, I fancy, when there is union between the forces of destiny and the forces of the human soul. Ah, the struggle has been hard and has lasted sixteen years. I can feel, retrospectively, the living thought which has been working upon me and which has subjugated me. All the acts by which I thought to efface the past made it more living; all the steps I took to move farther away from the faithless dead man brought me back to him. My

husband's race, which was destined to continue, through and in spite of me, will continue probably, and by my intervention! Oh, the fine irony of it! Formerly this would have seemed extremely cruel to me; to-day I admire it. I am glad to have been able to make the effort that it demanded. For several months I had had a secret wish to take the forgiveness and the repentance I had in my heart to my husband. Something held me back. Heaven knows what it was! As soon as I had obtained for his son the hand of Mademoiselle de Lusson, I felt an irresistible desire to go to my husband. I was the first to propose a visit to Chavigny. The engaged couple, who had not dared to ask for it, were wildly happy, and their god-mother had to endure the effusion of their gratitude. On Monday morning we started for Cher. It was one of those ideal days when it seems as though the air is full of caresses and promises of happiness. The whole journey, three hours by rail and three-quarters of an hour by carriage, I made desperate efforts to control the growing tumult of my feelings. My companions knew nothing of the real trial which awaited me; they were only thinking of the painful impression of this return to Chavigny! Oh, how little the thought of Chavigny troubled me! I was thinking of that poor tomb, intentionally neglected, to which I was now going for the first time. I imagined it quite deserted and covered with bushes. My husband had bought a new piece of ground to the right of his family vault. We had always wished to be buried side by side, out in the open air. I had contented myself with sending to his sister the detailed instructions he had left, and I had asked her to give the priest at R— a certain sum to keep his last resting-place in order. The question was, had all this been done? Whilst we were driving along in the carriage, the odiousness of my conduct presented

itself to my mind and brought a fleeting colour to my very forehead. Uneasy at my silence, Guy, who was seated by the coachman, turned round towards me.

"Are you all right, god-mother?" he asked, with the smile he had taken from the lips of his father.

I could only answer in an affirmative and friendly way with my eyes. As we approached Chavigny, Monsieur de Lusson put his hand on mine and, hiding his emotion by a joke, said —

"We are making Life, are we not, Madame de Myères?"

"Very much so," I replied gravely.

He little thought how much I was making at that moment! I wanted to go straight to the cemetery. My companions got out of the carriage at the entrance to the avenue leading to the *château*, and I continued driving. It was only a few minutes farther on. As soon as I was alone, a sweet and poignant emotion, the emotion of love, took entire possession of me. I had the sensation that my husband was awaiting me, and at every turn of the wheel, which brought me nearer to this dead man who had become so living again, my heart beat more and more violently and my veins throbbed. On arriving at the cemetery gate, my hand, which had not forgotten the secret of the inside latch, unfastened it mechanically, and it opened to me. As though in a dream, I moved onwards towards the family vault, and soon found myself at the foot of my husband's tomb. I knelt down and, flinging my arms over the railings, as though to clasp what remained of him, I could only murmur —

"My poor darling, forgive me." I could not find any other words. Were my thoughts affected in some occult way? I do not know, but it seemed to me that I held communion with him and that "we made it up," as the children say. I got up again feeling singularly

happy. Thank heaven, the good priest had acquitted himself of his task most faithfully. That was just the sepulchre that my husband had wished to have. A high railing ran round it. The cross of wrought-iron, with our device: "Towards the Light," emerged from an enormous rose-bush; strong, healthy ivy covered the ground and, at the corners, formed climbing bunches. I saw that my place was entirely covered with grass. My place! I gazed at it with a joy which no one else would be able to understand. I recalled, with a shudder, my long walks in search of a last resting-place; I had visited all the cemeteries of Paris, and had not found enough air and space in any one of them. Without knowing it, what I had really wanted was this place by the side of my life's companion. There was within me an instinct which claimed it. We do not yet know how deep the union may be between human creatures. With all my heart, as well as with my eyes, I now took possession of my husband's tomb again. I timidly caressed those flowers which were the resurrection of his flesh. To my sensibilised fingers they seemed to be invested with a living fluid. I began to pick off the faded leaves, to lift up certain branches, and I found delicious pleasure in what I was now doing for the first time. I had lost all notion of the time that had gone by, and the engaged couple grew anxious and came in search of me. I saw them at once, at the entrance to the cemetery, and made a sign to them to come to me. They arrived with a subdued expression, and Guy took off his hat.

"Dear god-father," he said simply. The emotion and affection in his voice reached the soul of his father, perhaps. I looked at the two young people with intense satisfaction. Was not their presence at this place my recompense? And this recompense was certainly

not due to chance. As I was moving away, after a last farewell to our dear one, some brambles caught the bottom of my skirt. I tried to free myself, but did not succeed, and Guy had to help me. He was seized with superstitious dread, and I saw him turn pale and look at me with sudden anxiety.

"It is as though your god-father wanted to keep me," I said gaily; "it would be only natural, for he has been alone so long."

We went back again in the direction of Chavigny. As soon as I caught sight of it I was struck, as I had never been before, by the harmony produced by its ancient lines, the warm tone of its grey stone, the scenery against which it stands in relief. It scarcely deserves the name of *château*, but has always been called so. On the whole, though, in spite of the modesty of its proportions, it has an imposing look. I am not surprised that it appealed to the imagination of my little friend. When we entered the courtyard, my eyes turned at once to the fatal flight of steps and, as though something within me still felt the old affront, I coloured painfully. Guy jumped out of the carriage first, and lifting me in his strong arms, said —

"Home, god-mother, dear."

I could not repeat the sacred word. There was no longer any home for me in this world, I knew that very well.

We were to lunch at the farm. Monsieur and Madame de Lusson were waiting for us there. I sent the young people on. With a sort of shyness of the soul, I wanted to see the old home again quite alone. I went all through it, from top to bottom of the house, with an emotion which almost suffocated me. The large pieces of furniture were still there. The windows had been opened, fires lighted in the drawing-rooms,

and the sun was streaming in. In spite of all that, I immediately had the impression of an empty nest which had been cold for a long time. I felt my incapacity to bring back life there, and I rejoiced to think that this care had fallen to others. Not one regret came to trouble me. When my visit was over, I went towards the farm with a light step. As soon as I appeared in the doorway of the room where the table was laid, Monsieur and Madame de Lusson, Guy and Josée looked at me with a questioning expression, as though to find out how I had endured the trial.

"Jean Noël has just had a new experience," I said gaily. "What one calls the 'state of soul' is one of the most admirable things that Nature creates. If Chavigny were offered to me with an income of eight thousand pounds, I would not accept it. It needs very much life and very much affection to warm it again. Only these young people are capable of doing it," I added, pointing to the engaged pair. "As to what there is now of me, why, there is just enough left to fill my rooms at the Hôtel de Castiglione, and no more."

Josée put her arm round my neck and her cheek against mine.

"And enough to make every one else happy," she said prettily.

During luncheon I spoke of the changes to be made at the *château*, and this with a pleasure and freedom of mind which could not leave any doubt about my sincerity. After coffee, as we were strolling about the farm, I saw, about a hundred yards away from the dairy buildings, a rustic-looking house which was unfamiliar and which was uninhabited. It had been built, it appears, by a man whose experiments in horticulture had not succeeded, and the owners of Chavigny had then bought it.

"Why, there's a cottage for the boys," exclaimed Guy, examining it.

Josée coloured with pleasure.

"I had thought of that, had I not, father?" she said, smiling.

"Yes," answered Monsieur de Lusson. "Do you know I believe that Providence judged it necessary to provide a god-father for this young person who was intending to educate men alone."

"If so, I am precious glad that the choice fell on me," answered my boy, with a fond look at Josée. "With six boys we shall be able to make an experiment in rearing human beings. That will be very interesting."

"Bravo," I said. "*I* was selfishly happy here; *you* will be nobly happy. Truly the world is moving onwards!"

We slept at the village of R—, a large village well provided with everything necessary, and, thanks to the Touring Club, the little hotel was very clean. My reconciliation with my husband was so thorough that I felt as though I had gone back to the past. I paid a long visit to the priest, and saw again with pleasure all the good people I used to know. They said to me on every side, "Madame has been travelling, has she not; madame has been living in foreign countries?" And all that did not cause me any embarrassment. I was very much touched to see how the memory of us both had remained in the hearts of all these rough peasants of Berry. No, the little deeds of kindness and the cordial words which we scatter on our path through life are not lost. This journey was a satisfaction for all of us. I am sure, though, that it did not give to the others, not even to the engaged pair, such joy as I experienced. I felt myself grow young inwardly. I felt as though I were loved

again, as in the olden days. This was, no doubt, an illusion of my imagination, but no matter, it was very sweet. And I understand now the value of that gift which Jesus made to His followers when He said, "I give you peace."

*Commanderie de Rouziers.*

Well, my mission here is over, and I return to Paris to-morrow. I am going to stay, not at the Hôtel de Castiglione, but at my god-son's, in the Rue d'Aguesseau. Still another thing that I should have thought impossible. The fatality continues. It happens that my rooms are at present occupied by neither more nor less a personage than the son of an exiled king. Other rooms were offered to me in the mean time, and I would willingly have taken them, but Guy, who wishes to domesticate me, at once offered me hospitality. He declared that, after living for five weeks in the warm atmosphere of the "Commanderie," the hotel would be too cold, and that his bachelor's flat would serve as a transition. He added a crowd of foolish reasons. The Lussons and Josée united with him, and I yielded. Ah, my independence, there is not much of it left! Louis was sent on first. His sister, who had been a cook at Bordeaux and had come to Paris to look for a place, is to keep house for us.

It was agreed that we should return to Paris by automobile. I was rejoicing, like a child, at the thought of going at full speed across the open space of the Beauce plains. Guy took it into his head, all at once, that the season was too advanced for me, that I should risk taking cold, and he begged me to be prudent and go by train. I protested with all my force, and finally declared that I would not go to the Rue d'Aguesseau unless he took me in his automobile. He had to give

in, in his turn, not without making me promise to get into the train at Orleans if I found the air too cold. It is true that it is now the tenth of November, and that this year Saint Martin has not cheated us of his summer, for the weather is superb. This afternoon I shall start for Tours, and shall sleep at the Hôtel de l'Univers, and then to-morrow, at eight o'clock, we shall set out on our journey. My trunk is packed; everything is ready. I have a pang at my heart as though I were starting on a long, long voyage. It is quite ridiculous. The Lussons will be back in Paris in a fortnight. We shall all come to the "Commanderie" again at the end of April, after the marriage of the children. I shall see the trees and hedges in bloom. I shall revel in a real spring. How good and restful it will be! It is curious that, for the last few months, rest has become my idea of happiness. Have I suddenly grown old? Am I so very weary, then?

## XI

### PARIS

*Rue d'Aguesseau, Paris.*

"My child, your vanity will be your ruin." These words, which my poor mother repeated so often during my childhood and youth, keep coming to my memory. They were certainly prophetic. I did not like the idea of being treated as an old woman and of coming back prudently by train. I wanted to go one last journey alone with Guy in his bachelor's automobile. It gave me a frightful cold, a dreadful cold. Whatever may be the consequences of my obstinacy, I shall never regret it. That run from Tours to Paris was bewitching. Wrapped in my long mink-lined cloak, covered with fur rugs, a hot-water bottle for my feet, and seated proudly by my boy, I experienced a physical well-being that was perfect, and then that superhuman sensation of rushing through space, of devouring distance. In Beauce it seemed to me that we were flying along the ground, over the surface of the globe, and that we should join the setting sun beyond the horizon. During the dizzy descent which leads to Dourdan, where the road disappears, where one sees nothing but the valley right down to the bottom, yawning like an abyss, I had an impression of an invisible, irresistible force urging us on, and I held my breath until we reached the bottom. Several times I asked Guy to increase the speed; he refused to do this, and we did not exceed about thirty miles an hour. When we arrived at the Rue d'Aguesseau I was literally intox-

icated with air, and my god-son lifted me out of the automobile like a parcel. The atmosphere of his bachelor home, well warmed, well lighted, and all decorated with flowers in my honour, seemed to me delightful. He has given me his library as a writing-room, and the bedroom adjoining it. Before sitting down to table we went to look at Colette's portrait. The play of the flames from the fire-place made it look living, and we both of us had the illusion that it was smiling at us. Our little *tête-à-tête* dinner was exquisite. My host looked after me all the time, as though I were a precious being. I had almost forgotten the sweetness of that sensation. We talked until very late. I fought against the sleepiness which was taking possession of me, in order to prolong the consciousness of that warmth, that security which seemed to me so good, and I was sorry to go to bed. This morning, towards seven o'clock, I was roused by a prolonged, severe shiver. Then, between the walls, as it were, of my body, there was a sort of furious breaking loose of forces, a feeling of illness which manifested itself by a violent pain in my right side, a convulsive cough, and a sudden feeling of oppression. I had the greatest difficulty to finish dressing. Ashamed and humiliated, I was obliged to tell Guy that I had taken cold.

"Decidedly," I added, between two fits of coughing, "I am an old woman. I did not want to think so, but I shall remember it another time and be more docile."

"People can take cold at any age, god-mother dear," he replied, with his nicest smile. "I am sorry you have such a bad cold, but I am glad to be able to take care of you in my turn. I would not have had you go to the hotel for anything in the world."

I was very careful not to let him guess that I regretted not being alone if I had to suffer.

Pneumonia . . . only that! When Dr. H— raised his head after sounding me, I saw a troubled and pained expression in his eyes. He must have been told that I had come back from Tours in an open automobile.

"Oh, Madame de Myères," he said, "there are things one can do at forty which are dangerous at fifty-eight."

Rather hard, but quite right. I am persuaded, though, that in the state I was in, even a drive in the Bois would have laid me low just the same. This sudden illness was quite a revelation. Since that fever, caused by grief, which I had after the death of my husband I have never had had to stay in bed or in my room. With the help of Dr. H— I have struggled victoriously with rheumatism, and I thought that was my only enemy. For a long time, though, I have heard curious noises, whistlings and twitterings in my bronchial tubes and in my chest. I was not aware that the respiratory organs and one lung was getting choked up. Ignorant old woman that I was! And now they are affected. I should like to have used a knife to free them! We are taught to examine our conscience before presenting ourselves to the priest, but we are not taught to study our body before presenting ourselves to the doctor. The doctor! He ought to be the working engineer of the human machine, and not only its repairer. He ought to visit those whom he attends as often as possible, to make sure of the working of the wheels, of the good condition of all the organs; perhaps there would then be no more bronchitis nor pneumonia nor tuberculosis! In the twentieth century we send for the doctor when we are ill. We leave to disease the case of purifying our organism! It often does this for us, but never without enfeebling or injuring it. That seems to me inconceivable now-a-days! We do not yet know how to care for our body. A *chauffeur* would never act in this way with his machine.

I have just been proving that to Guy. He ought to profit by the lesson. He recognised the truth of what I said, and his dear face lighted up, his child-like remorse vanished.

"Neither you, nor I, nor the automobile is responsible," I added. "The pneumonia was there; it would have had to declare itself. We did not know it was there, that was all, and probably we were not to know. The only thing left is to be brave. Let us both be so."

We clasped hands for a moment, and there was a silent understanding between us, which made us strong and happy again.

Did I not tell Sir William that there would be, somewhere, a kind Sister of Charity destined to tend me at the last? She is here, and her name is Sister Anne. Her spiritualised face charms me, her hands are respectful and tender. From a hundred little details I know that she is a lady, and nothing equals that. She is seconded admirably by Rose, Louis' sister. I feel that I am surrounded by human sympathy and devotion, and this cheers me. Providence, the Great Misunderstood, has given me still more. It has obliged me to open my heart to my husband's son, that is true, but was it not so that this son might help me to cross the bar? Did it not wish to give me a reflection of the father's love? Dear Guy, he really loves this coughing, feverish, rattling thing that I now am. I have the greatest difficulty in getting him to leave me and to go and have a breath of fresh air out of doors. I have insisted on his going out for an automobile drive. He hates it now as a child might. I do not want him to sulk with his innocent machine, that admirable Panhard which gave me such rare pleasure. I refuse to stay in bed, and I spend the whole day in the library, lying on the sofa, dressed in a tea-gown which I had

the happy inspiration to have made before going to Aix-les-Bains, and which I wanted to have particularly elegant. In this way I fancy myself less ill. I am glad to be under Colette's eyes. It seems to me that the expression of her portrait changes every minute. I have books all around me, my papers within reach of my hand, and a bright wood fire. Between the frame of the French window I see the little sleeping garden, with its fine sycamore trees. It is full of birds — sparrows and robins — which Louis feeds conscientiously. All this is better than a private hospital, which was my secret terror. I must be grateful, yes, but I suffer terribly. How painful this pneumonia is!

An injection of *héroine!* Under the magic of this new remedy my sufferings have diminished and my mind has acquired greater lucidity. Science can do this much for me, but no more, I fear. No matter, it shall be blessed and thanked for this. Thanks to the welcome *héroine* I shall be able to face death. Jean Noël will not put down, until the very last moment, this American pen with which he has written so many, many pages. The dear pen, it has a beautiful gold point; its hollow holder, filled with ink, is agreeable to the touch. It is the most precious of my possessions. For a long time I was troubled as to whom I should leave it; I am glad to be able to give it to "my boy." He will handle it with affection, I know. Between his fingers it will, perhaps, do better work than between mine. Above this suffering chest, in which all the organs are congested, my head remains clear and free, as though one did not belong to the other. Curiously enough, for the first time, and it is certainly late enough for that, I notice the rapidity with which images succeed each other within us, and their apparent want of con-

nection. I say apparent, for, probably, only the tenuity of their weaving prevents me from distinguishing this. Within the space of a few seconds I have just seen in my mind the face of a person whom I have not met for forty years; the eyes of a distant friend; the style of a tailor costume; the statue of Saint Francis of Assisi in a church at Foligno in Italy; a polychrome statue clothed in a frayed-out sackcloth garment to the knees; one of Footit's grimaces; the pattern of the dress of one of my dolls — a white lozenge design on a blue ground; the doll's little wrap — a hideous arrangement, with holes for the arms, called a *visite*. The head of the said doll did not come to my remembrance again. Is this not strange? It seems to me that brain-cells must be like the dots in the eye of the marguerite. According to the corresponding nerve that is touched, they open and give, with the rapidity of lightning, what they contain — an image, an idea, a memory. What is it that makes such or such a nerve vibrate? I certainly do not know.

My boy, who does not like to appear to treat me as a dying person, keeps me well informed about all subjects, political and social news and everything else. This morning he was talking to me of radium and of its fantastical properties. A stream of joy and hope seemed to enter into me. Light, warmth, electricity, inexhaustible radiation, beams equal to its own! They are found, then, the elements of immortality! Is not immortality the perpetual movement of the soul? How can we admit that matter possesses all these things, and that they are not in superior force in all that which has life. Oh, science will arrive at that, at the radio-activity of the human being. Science will come to that at the right moment. When Madame Curie went along, heaping up calculations upon cal-

culations, formula upon formula, did she suspect the existence of this extraordinary body? I would wager that she did not. And it was not chance that made of her an active instrument in this immense discovery. It seems to me that Providence wished, in this way, to give to woman her letters-patent of true nobility and emancipation. As soon as I am cured I shall go and present my homage to radium and to the woman who freed it from its gangue. Oh, I must see this miraculous salt. Has it not always been said that salt is the wisdom of the earth!

As soon as I am cured! Hm! — in the mean time I have made my will again. I leave my little friend to distribute my nomad's baggage. It is not heavy, but it may make a few happy people, nevertheless. As to the old trunk, my faithful companion, I wish that to be burned. I certainly owe it the honours of an *auto-da-fé*. Some of the money which I have not put into my annuity will serve to recompense certain services which have been very pleasant to me. The remainder is to be used for the purchase of a string of beautiful pearls, my wedding present to Josée. When her fingers touch them, the image of her god-mother will appear again in her mind and cause a fond thought. Human thought arrives, perhaps, as far as the Beyond! After radium, I can believe in all possibilities. The thought of it haunts me. I have left the money from my books for bringing up six boys. There will be twelve in the Chavigny Cottage, and my work, in this world, will thus be perpetuated for a long time to come. What could be imagined finer than that! The perspective of being driven in a funeral hearse, when dead, through the streets of Paris, in the midst of living people has always seemed to me humiliating and in-

tolerable. I am asking to be taken straight to R——. The good priest there will receive me and take me to my last home. No hideous funeral cards with black borders. On my visiting cards I have written "P.P.C." Guy will put the date and send them to the people whom I have indicated. There are not many of them, but each one will have a feeling of sincere regret. I have made all these preparations as though in a dream. Once only I broke down with sorrow for myself, and nervous tears filled my eyes. In the depths of my heart, do I believe in my departure? Perhaps not!

I wanted to see my publisher. We have always been on pleasant terms. With him the business side is so straightforwardly managed that it does not prevent friendship and congenial feeling. He was visibly shocked on seeing me grappling with pneumonia. I tried to continue our usual jesting tone, in order to put him at his ease. He had not the courage to answer me. When I said to him, though, that I looked upon novels and all books as veritable accumulators, and bookshops as the sources of intellectual energy, he began to laugh, and that dispelled our emotion. I recommended to his care my two last-born children. If I am not destined to see them appear, he will take more pains still to ensure their success, I am sure. He said the most hopeful words, and through his kiss on my hand I felt the warmth of sincere affection. The relations between publisher and author ought to be of the most elevated nature. In their transactions there ought to be not only honesty, but honour. The publisher who pays the sacred work of thought poorly, or who does not pay with scrupulous conscientiousness the rights due to the author is only a trader of low degree, fit for the lowest market-place. After the de-

parture of my visitor a smile came to my lips. I remembered our first interview. I had, of course, chosen one of my propitious days to take my manuscript to the Rue A——. In spite of that I was not at all reassured. I went very slowly up the staircase of the famous publishing house. After sending up my card I sat down on the bench where people wait, facing a huge clock which looked as though it were making fun of me. I saw myself in the centre of an open square, the three sides of which were formed by yellow and green books, and above these a gallery with desks ornamented by lamps with shades. Oh, there was no room lost there! Heads covered with round caps, heads of men who had been there since the founding of the business, were to be seen here and there. Ladders rolled along on iron rods. The silence was only interrupted by the call for some volume and by the bang with which the said volume was thrown on the counter. In this square, which seemed like a bee-hive to me, I noticed that there was well organised activity, but it was not joyous, not at all modern. The atmosphere seemed to be rigid, rather discouraging. I entered the editorial office, fully persuaded that I had come to the wrong place. I was received, not with any effusion, certainly, for one cannot imagine an elderly woman with a manuscript being received with effusion; that would have been inconceivable, but the reception which I had was all that could be desired as regards politeness. I was told that my novel would be read. I could not have hoped for more than that. To be brief, it was read, and accepted, and Jean Noël signed his first contract at the age of fifty-two, not a day too soon. It was not long before success had created between my publisher and me a sort of good humour, out of which a cordial friendship sprang. The beehive of Rue A—— has now become familiar and

dear to me. Most of its workers have done something for my books, one of them looked over my proofs, another opened up the way for them abroad, this one packed them, that one sent them off. Ah, well, I am grateful to them all. I could not have done without them. When one examines Life thoroughly, one has no difficulty in realising the solidarity and fraternity of it. That literary *début* seems to me so far back now! It is curious how everything seems to go further back. Just as the aeronaut has the sensation that the earth is disappearing from him, so I have a sensation that the past is leaving me. One of the effects of *héroine* perhaps.

Twenty-four hours of calm, another long shudder, a stitch in the left side and the second lung affected. With what am I to breathe now? Sir William endured this torture of suffocation a whole year without *héroine*. And he did not put an end to it. I cry out for air, for oxygen, just as he used to do. I remembered that pneumonia was contagious, and I asked the doctor to disinfect the room, the library, me myself as much as possible, and to make use of all the means science has put at his disposal, without any ridiculous scruples. He was glad that the initiative came from me. He is going to take advantage of that to try some new substance. The idea that I have brought infection into this pretty home, which was so fresh and so wholesome, that I may be a danger for those who are with me, is more painful to me than the perspective of death. Death! Sir William was not mistaken, the nearer one gets to it, the less terrible it appears. That I will affirm and will vouch for. I wish to render that justice to Nature. She certainly prepares the individual for it. During the night I was thinking of love, of

youth, of success, of distant journeys, of whist and bridge, and not one of those things roused any regret in me. Ah, no thank you, I am very much too tired! The idea of escaping infirmities and extreme old age would have consoled me for dying at twenty. Vanity can become a force. If death were not sent to us, we should ask for it. It is still a scarecrow to us because humanity is very young, but when it has reached the age of manhood it will see death in its true aspect, and will await it with serenity. One day in Kirby's window, in the Rue Auber, I saw some flowers which, after being dipped in a certain composition, could be preserved indefinitely. In appearance, neither their form nor their colour had changed, and yet they had lost their subtle and mysterious charm. The flowers must die, and man must die. It is death which makes the value of life.

I have made my kind Sister Anne very happy. This morning, as she moved about round me, she looked at me with an anxious expression. I called her to me and, smiling, asked her to go and fetch me a priest. That was what she wanted, I had guessed it. Her sweet face brightened with spiritual joy, and that joy proved to be a very elevated and very disinterested sentiment. She was anxious about my soul and wished for my salvation. That is what I call fraternity, if I understand the word rightly. With the intuition of people who believe, she doubted my orthodoxy and feared, perhaps, that I was hostile to religion. Heaven preserve me! I do not approve of the Japanese children who, on leaving school, break the nose of the fox-god which their parents used to adore. All beliefs, all superstitions even, mark the halting-places of the progress of humanity. They are our data, and we must

respect them. On my entrance into this world I was blessed with the rites of the Catholic Church. On my departure I wish to be blessed in the same way. Then, too, a great and haunting desire has come to me, it is to receive the viaticum. The germ of this desire was sown in me more than thirty years ago. During a Trouville season I went one Sunday to service at the church frequented by the visitors, in order to exhibit a certain dress of blue silk with white spots made by a good dressmaker. Was not that woman-like? That day there was to be music and a sermon for the profit of some charitable mission. The sermon, preached by a Dominican, was on the Eucharist. The manly and vibrating voice of the monk captivated my ear, his words laid hold of me. Unconsciously, perhaps, or by a marvellous intuition, he gave an exposition of the dogma in a more scientific than theological way. He declared that communion was a law of Nature. After showing us that we hold communion in love, in friendship, with light, with all the forces of existence, he showed us logically the possibility, the necessity of communion with God, the Eternal Source of Life. I was deeply moved. "Yes, why not?" I murmured in a low voice. My serene incredulity was shaken for the first time. Four hundred years earlier such a sermon would have taken the Dominican to the stake. I gazed attentively at his face so that I should not forget it. It was a fine human mask, energetic, intelligent, beaming with faith. On leaving the church I went into the vestry to ask the name of the preacher. I was told it was Father Didon. The explanation of this mystery of the Eucharist, which until then had never seemed to me worthy of serious discussion, has remained in my mind. As science has taught me to look closer at Nature, I had gone along repeating "Why not?" But

out of the thousands of human creatures who approach the mystical table, how few hold communion! It seems to me that one must be capable of a profound aspiration towards the ideal, towards the divine, that one must have a special state of soul. I thought I had now arrived at this, and that is why I wanted to see the priest. He came and we talked, but not without some difficulty. He examined me with a scrutinising look. Then he treated me a little as he might have done the man who goes to get a certificate of confession the evening before his marriage. In his absolution he put an emphasis which did not escape me. My faith in God and in immortality reassured him, though. He had brought me what he calls "the bread of life." What a beautiful name in the ears of a dying woman! And that bread gave me joy in the deep waves, a peace which made a strange silence within me. Verily, I believe that I held communion.

For the last five years I have kept, jealously, in a compartment of my trunk, my grave dress. I thought I was destined to fall "from the branch" in the midst of strangers. I did not want to leave the choice of it to them. Heaven knows in what horrors they might have buried me. The making of this garment gave a certain scare, it appears, in the dressmaker's workroom. One of the young girls even wept warm tears over it. I had felt obliged at the time to bring back the gaiety that I had chased away by the gift of a twenty-franc piece. This morning I had a fancy to try on this last dress. It is of white serge, of an ivory shade, entirely lined with silk, with a long train, two classical pleats, and wide sleeves. It has a hood trimmed with some fine old guipure, which is to serve as a mask. I congratulated myself on my

far-seeing coquetry. It is a veritable master-piece, and makes me look like an abbess. I thought it suited me so well that I wanted to keep it on. I had forgotten that I had shown it to Guy, one day when packing my trunk. He recognised it, and the unexpected shock made him lose his self-possession for a minute. He gazed at me; tears welled up to his eyes; he came and threw himself down on his knees by my couch, saying in a voice of anguish —

"God-mother, god-mother, it is not time yet!"

For a few minutes I was pleased at the sight of this passionate grief of which I was the object. In the son of my husband and Colette it had a particular relish for me. Then it touched my maternal fibres, and they vibrated with affection and pity.

"No, no, my boy, the hour has not yet come," I said, as one would speak to a child in order to console it; and with a sudden inspiration I added, "We are both in a nervous state, I through illness, and you through anxiety. We need the Lussons and Josée, they will bring us fresh forces and put us right. Telegraph to them at once to come and help us." Guy was not duped, I knew that by his emotion. All the same, I think I forestalled his own secret desire. I then took a few of the roses he had sent me that very morning and put them into the folds of my white robe, to make it into the dress of a living person. He gave a smile of satisfaction. So small a thing is necessary for reviving hope. Josée's presence will soften the grief of my departure if there is to be a departure. I want her to share his grief. Tears unite more than laughter. Once again I felt that heart, in the depths of my being, with which mothers love and sacrifice themselves. It seems to me that this made me greater.

They are all here, Madame and Monsieur de Lusson, Josée, Guy and Uncle Georges. What a warm fire of friendship this makes for me! And only a year ago I had so thoroughly resolved to finish alone, to hide myself away to die. In spite of the charm of feeling myself surrounded by such loving care, I suffer at times from the attentions they all lavish on me. For a nature as independent as mine there is more merit in receiving than in giving. It requires still more generosity. I had guessed rightly that Josée had clever hands. She knows how to arrange my pillows as no one else can. She has the intuition as regards what relieves me and what is agreeable to me. She helps me by a hundred little artifices to overcome my increasing disgust for food. She has set about fighting with pneumonia with such ardour as to make me almost wish for her to win the victory. We are all of us very brave. Monsieur de Lusson is the least courageous. Frequently, in the very midst of our conversation, I see on his eye-glasses the reflection of the tears which have risen to his eyes. He cannot resign himself to the possible loss of his partner at bridge and whist. Joking aside, the five weeks which I have spent at the "Commanderie," and our pleasant chats, have bound us more closely together than we had imagined. Our friendship, without our being aware of it, had gone ahead at the rate of eighty-five an hour. I talked to him about radium, but he declared that, at present, he could not be grateful to science for anything else but my cure. If my work in the world is accomplished I shall be called away. There is no science that can hold out against that.

I had the joy of seeing the sympathy which sprang up at first sight between Uncles Georges and his future niece. Those two, I would wager, will be a fine pair of friends.

I have asked for the wedding to be fixed for the 6th of April, three days after Easter. Every one has consented to this. My dear god-children! I feel sure that they will often turn their steps in the direction of the R—— cemetery. Although I have seen a great deal of forgetfulness in the world, I believe that they will remember me. There will be leaves and flowers on my grave. The bees will come there to plunder, and I shall be helping Life. That thought is very sweet to me. Guy and Josée would certainly not like to see their god-mother transformed into a handful of ashes. After all, then, there is to be some one to whom my remains are not to be indifferent. Sir William once said to me, "You do not know!" Ah, no, I did not know.

My children are in great grief. They dare not be happy, and yet all the same they are happy. I rejoice to see this, and it consoles me. A little while ago they were here with me. I looked at their complexion, coloured by rich, pure blood, at their thick hair, their limpid eyes. Oh, those youthful eyes, those eyes with the dawn in them, and then their healthy teeth, their firm, fresh lips. I admired, without any regret or envy, their insignia of vitality. Above my weak, almost worn-out body, I could feel the waves of love, that eternal conqueror, passing and repassing from one to the other of them. For an instant I had a vision of the continuity of things, and Jean Noël, ignoring Madame de Myères, repeated mentally, "How beautiful Life is, how very beautiful!"

Last night was a very bad one; I fancy I was slightly delirious, and the feverishness revived a whole crowd of painful impressions. Why should it have revived just those! I lived over again, through every detail, that terrible moment when, in all the anger of a betrayed wife,

I had stood there facing the dead man. Oh, those clenched hands, the impotence before that awful void! Again I tore from my finger the wedding-ring which my husband had placed there. Just as it had been in reality, my flesh held it back, and it hurt me very much. Colette's black eyes, the scene on the stone steps, all that took form again in the most cruel way in my mind. Then I dreamed that Guy, the father, was kneeling beside Josée. I wanted to rush forward to claim him again, but my feet were bound, and I woke up bathed in the perspiration of a nightmare. Never, I should think, had the cells of my brain opened with such rapidity, such fantastic incoherence. They plunged me back, me, a dying woman, into my childhood, into my youth. The past is so far away that it no longer has any data, but these images remain very distinct. I saw again the tall figure of Mr. Gray, that poor English professor, who, all unwittingly, had enabled me to study the Saxon soul and to write my future novels. The first lines of his *Robertson's Grammar* came back to my memory as though I had learnt it yesterday: "We are told that the Sultan Mahmoud, etc." Forty-four years had not effaced it! What marvellous instruments of work we are! Towards half-past three in the morning, on waking from a painful dream, my eyes fell on Sister Anne. She was seated at the foot of my bed, quite upright in her arm-chair, as clearly outlined as some hieratic figure, with her black veil, her forehead-band and *guimpe* of immaculate white. There was no trace of fatigue in her attitude. The expression of her face was sweet and meditative, and she was reading her little book, covered with black cloth, *The Imitation*. Is that the accumulator from which she draws the psychical force that sustains her and the devotion she shows to me? The dear Sister, her hope of reward will not be in vain, I am

certain. None of our hopes will be in vain. Our future state must be more beautiful than we have pictured it. For my part, the beatitudes do not tempt me. All I ask is to make Life again and for ever, to die in order to be born again, and to be born again in order to die. . . .

Where in the Beyond, and when, shall I meet my husband again? If my soul were to have lips, what a hearty kiss I should receive! Our meeting in this world was wonderful, our union divine. The very evening of our wedding day we went to Chavigny. The house was full of flowers, light and gentle warmth, like a corner of terrestrial Paradise. For dinner I put on again my bridal dress, a princess robe of white satin, with a spray of orange blossom on the bodice. I then went to the library where my lord and master was awaiting me. As I entered the room he came towards me, his arms stretched out, and, looking into his eyes just as in a dream of happiness, I moved slowly forward and fell upon his breast. There I heard two hearts beating, the one on the right side and the other on the left; two hearts making perfect rhythm, one strong and one weak. I had the sensation, then, of complete being, of the fulness of life. This lasted a few seconds, and it was so strange that we were both struck with holy awe. Our arms fell down at our sides, and we gazed at each other in astonishment. We had just recognised each other, no doubt. That is the minute that I should like to live again. That is the minute for which I am hoping. Oh, the meeting again! Humanity has pictured it in so absurd, so childish a way. Let us leave to God the care of preparing it. He has the secret of such joys and rewards. I am quite content, for my part, to "commit my soul into His hands."

. . .

"Your rooms are waiting for you." That is what they write to me from the Hôtel Castiglione! What irony! The room will go on waiting for me for a long time, I fancy. Did I not have the presentiment that I should never go back to them when I left there in July? Oh, the thud of that omnibus door shutting after me. I can still hear it. The dear little room in which Jean Noël was born! If I could have had the choice I should have liked to finish between the four walls of that room. Guy will buy the clock which counted my hours of great solitude and of work; the table to which so many consoling spirits came. I have expressed a wish that he should put them in the Chavigny library; a curious instinct makes me want to go back there. I know with what tender reverence they will be surrounded. I have arranged a future in this way for my old companions, a future worthy of envy. . . .

Livid circles under my eyes, my nose pinched, patches of yellow here and there, my lips discoloured and dry — that is the horrible picture my hand-glass reflects at present. And there is a great deal of grief felt all around me. Uncle Georges, among others, is deplorably weak. Yesterday evening, in order to keep me back, he found nothing better to do than to own to the love that he has always felt for me, the secret of which he had kept in so manly a way. Just as though I had not guessed it. Yes, I had been inwardly proud of it! It was the homage of a large heart. Would any one believe it possible, but this declaration, this last one, was very sweet and agreeable to me.

My femininity and my vanity are still very living. My boy breaks my heart. There is a mute supplication in his eyes which moves me to the depths of my soul. If I could stay here, should I like to do so? No — ah

no! Something tells me that I am leaving in time. To leave in time, that is the way to be regretted! . . .

It is nearly finished . . . Jean Noël's last novel. I feel suffocated. . . . Impossible to take anything, and at times I get out of my depth. The *héroine* does not do me good any longer. The branch is bending . . . it is bending terribly . . . It is even cracking under me. . . . And I am not afraid. . . . not at all afraid. . . . Like the bird of whom the poet sings . . . "I know that I have wings."

. . . . . .

Fallen from the branch.

THE END